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ABSTRACT

This book was written to help schools and educators in their efforts to raise the self-esteem of adolescent students. The first chapter presents the layout of the book. Chapter 2 explains Coopersmith's (1967) model of self-esteem, emphasizing the model's relevance to secondary education. Experiences leading to feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue, considered by Coopersmith to be the four sources of self-esteem, are each considered individually as they relate to self-esteem theory and to adolescent development. In chapter 3, Coopersmith's model is discussed as it relates to Dreikurs' four causes of misbehavior, Glasser's reality therapy, and Bandura's self-efficacy mechanism. Chapters 4 through 7 deal with helping the student with low self-esteem, focusing on recognizing student strengths and abilities (chapter 4), available school resources and approaches (chapter 5), applications to particular student problems (chapter 6), and self-esteem enhancement as a preventive strategy (chapter 7). Chapters 8 through 11 examine school and classroom variables related to student self-esteem. Chapter 8 looks at the school variables of size, location, design and appearance, and scheduling procedures. Chapter 9 compares unidimensional to multidimensional classrooms, competitive to cooperative teaching strategies, and student-centered to content-centered curricula. Chapter 10 suggests possible school-wide interventions and chapter 11 discusses communications approaches. The book concludes with a 91-item bibliography. (NB)

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ADOLESCENT SELF-ESTEEM AND THE SCHOOLS

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

Overview: What This Book Is (and Isn't)

Gerald Caplan, generally credited as being the father of modern preventive psychiatry, has described certain ancient cultures whose citizens felt that they had a sure and dependable method for determining whether a given individual was insane. The person in question would be seated before a large wooden tub with a spigot attached, through which water would be started running into the tub. The individual would then be given a bucket and would be told that his or her task was to empty the tub of water. If the person simply flailed madly away with the bucket, without ever attempting to stop the flow of water at its source, that person was judged to be insane (Berkowitz, 1975).

In the same way, if schools continue to experience significant numbers of students who act out, tune out, skip out, or drop out and respond solely with more and bigger "buckets of cure", without attempting to prevent the flow of such difficulties at their source, then the educational institutions involved could also be judged insane. This book is based on the belief that one thing schools can do to prevent or eliminate much student dysfunction at its source is to raise students' self-esteem. Its aim is to show how that can be accomplished.

Toward that end, Adolescent Self-Esteem and the Schools begins with an attempt to provide clarity and specificity to the concept of self-esteem. Too often, the failure to engage in such clarification and specification results in overly vague and generic educational prescriptions which are of rather limited practical utility, such as the admonition to simply "catch them being good." Through understanding in greater detail exactly what constitutes or produces high self-esteem, educators will become capable of much more precise and efficacious intervention strategies for enhancing self-esteem in their students.

The particular model of self-esteem presented here was first proposed by Stanley Coopersmith, in conjunction with his seminal research on the antecedents of self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967, 1981). This model, which specifies four separate sources of high self-esteem, is described in Section II of this volume, with particular emphasis on its relevance to secondary education and to adolescent development generally.

Section III then explores various potential applications of this theory of self-esteem to the remediation of self-esteem difficulties of individual students. It should be noted at this point that the applications to be presented here are not predominantly counselling or office-bound techniques, but are, rather, curricular and ecological approaches. It is an implicit but firm assumption throughout this book that therapy aimed at enhancing an adolescent's self-esteem will be of only marginal utility in the absence of sufficient real-life success on which to base genuinely high self-esteem. Without such real-life success, therapeutic strategies can devolve into mere exhortation or gimmickry.

William James, in his Principles of Psychology (1890), presented one early model of self-esteem, represented by the ratio of one's successes to one's pretensions, i.e. self-esteem = $\frac{\text{success}}{\text{pretensions}}$. While the psychological factors entering into the bottom half of the ratio (e.g., one's aspirations, values, and attributions) can be addressed through various psychotherapeutic strategies, prolonged and bona fide real-life successes are also clearly required by the model if one is to achieve legitimately high self-esteem. For youth living in our culture, success or failure in school has a pronounced impact, either positive or negative, on the upper half of the ratio proposed by James; this impact is the dominant focus of this book.

As emphasized by Caplan's analogy, however, approaches designed to remediate individual self-esteem deficiencies cannot and must not be the only focus of schools' efforts to address issues of limited self-esteem. Section IV therefore considers the role of the larger educational system as well, examining school-wide and class-wide variables which appear to be related to student self-esteem. Such an analysis is a requisite first step toward the development of pervasive, ecologically based strategies designed to foster positive self-concepts and high self-esteem in the overall student body and toward the eventual primary prevention of insufficient self-esteem.

SECTION II

COOPERSMITH'S THEORY OF SELF-ESTEEM

Chapter 2

The Four Components of High Self-Esteem

Stanley Coopersmith conducted much of the earliest, most extensive, and most important research on self-esteem. In his summarizing book, he wrote that "on the basis of extended interviews with... subjects and the results of previous studies, we propose that there are four different types of experiences that... provide a sense of increased worth when they are attained" (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 38). These four sources of self-esteem he considered to be experiences leading to feelings of significance, of competence, of power, and of virtue. If the presence or absence of these four types of feelings differentiates those high in self-esteem from those low in self-esteem, then the provision of experiences which engender such feelings would appear to have the potential to induce increased self-esteem in those originally lacking in positive self-regard.

In the present chapter, each of the four aspects of self-esteem will be considered individually, as they relate to self-esteem theory and to adolescent development. In subsequent chapters, experiences which can be provided within schools to foster such feelings will be enumerated.

Feelings of Significance

Significance, according to Coopersmith, lies in "the acceptance, attention, and affection of others." The person high in self-esteem, in contrast to one deficient in self-esteem, feels that he/she is meaningfully engaged with other people. The individual high in self-esteem feels important to, involved with, and valued by the other significant people in his or her life. Because the individual feels genuinely liked by others, he/she consequently comes to feel that he/she is a likable person, with likable qualities. This process, through which we develop our self-image in part from what others appear to think of us, has long been recognized and is commonly referred to by the term "reflected appraisals" (Mead, 1934; Videbeck, 1960).

Feelings of significance are vital for high self-esteem, and all of us have a need for such feelings. Indeed, late in his career, William James, the eminent early American psychologist, reportedly summarized his thoughts on human functioning by asserting that "the deepest need in human nature is the craving to be appreciated."

No one is immune from such a need, but there are at least two reasons why it is of special importance for secondary schools to engender feelings of significance in their pupils. The first is a consequence of the developmental stage of adolescence. During childhood a student's feelings of importance, significance, involvement, and worth derive in large measure from experiences within the family, but with increasing maturity experiences outside the family become increasingly important to the attainment and maintenance of such feelings. During adolescence proper, the gradual attainment of greater independence from parental influence is an expected and normal developmental process, which youth nevertheless go through with varying degrees of turmoil or rebellion. While actively seeking increased independence from parents, many teenagers temporarily reject their parents as acceptable sources for obtaining feelings of significance, and must rely on other sources for feedback and involvement which validate their self-worth. Peers typically represent one such source of significance and self-validation, but there remains a need for adult sources of feedback as well. Most typically in our culture, feelings of significance and connectedness with adults are obtained *via* teachers and other school staff.

The second reason why it is of paramount importance that schools engender feelings of significance in their adolescent pupils lies in the many deleterious consequences which occur when students fail to achieve such feelings in a positive fashion. For if a student fails to attain feelings of significance through accepted and recognized channels, the need for such feelings does not dissipate; it merely seeks expression through other, less desirable, means. The student faced with feelings of insignificance will often seek to attain some form of significance through inordinate attention-getting behavior.*

Other youngsters failing to gain sufficient feelings of significance from their interactions with school staff or other adults may join adolescent gangs or engage in group delinquent activities. In this way, they hope to attain personal significance at least within their group or gang and to achieve a degree of significance within their general environment, based on the group's identity, reputation, and status. What's more, the attention-seeking and group delinquent behaviors resulting from unmet significance needs are further complicated by the fact that it is much easier for students to victimize unfamiliar individuals than those with whom one is meaningfully involved. (Anyone who questions the veracity of this statement need only check with any substitute teacher he/she may know.) Thus, schools' failure to engender feelings of significance within their students not only provokes misbehavior, but it also renders such behavior more easily engaged in.

For all these reasons it is crucial that schools provide each and every student with acceptable and attainable ways to achieve feelings of interpersonal significance. The developmental needs of adolescence necessitate active, mutual involvements with adults if mental health is to be achieved. And for the prevention of disruptive, delinquent, or anti-social behavior, meaningful involvements with school staff are equally necessary. As Eddie Cantor once said, "Whenever I see those lists of Most Wanted Men, I can't help but feel that if they'd been more wanted when they were younger, they wouldn't be so wanted now."

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*For an unscientific but amusing and psychologically astute personal assessment of the role of such dynamics in the development of the class clown, the reader is referred to George Carlin's record album, Class Clown, Little David Records.

How well schools are currently doing in meeting their students' needs to feel significant is a debatable issue, and the answer no doubt varies from school to school and district to district. It is disquieting to note, however, that in a survey of 818 students attending a suburban high school near Portland, Oregon, only 27% of the students answered yes to the item "I feel wanted and needed at this school" (Jones, 1980).

Feelings of Competence

The second component of positive self-esteem identified by Coopersmith is a feeling of competence. Competence is defined as "successful performance in meeting demands for achievement." The individual with high self-esteem typically feels capable, adequate, competent, and successful in one or more of the important aspects of his/her life.

As with feelings of significance, all of us have a need to experience feelings of competence. We can all remember times of failure, the temporary feelings of incompetence such experiences provoked, and the consequent detrimental impact on our emotional state and our level of self-esteem. But there are once again both psychological and practical reasons why feelings of competence or incompetence possess particular importance for adolescents.

As adults, we at least have the advantage of having developed a relatively stable and enduring self-concept. By and large, we have come to know and to accept what we are good at and what we do not so well. If we encounter failure from time to time, as is inevitable in life, we can cope, in part, by recalling a history of past successes and triumphs. But adolescents have no such history on which to draw and consequently find it more difficult to maintain perspective. Because certain experiences or emotions are new to them, they frequently assume that such experiences or feelings are, in fact, unique to them, and in the case of aversive occurances or debilitating failures, such a perception may prove to be overwhelming.

In addition, adolescence is a period directly concerned with developing a self-concept and with questioning one's personal ability and identity (Erikson, 1950, 1968). During adolescence, newly developed cognitive skills allow youths to begin to consider abstract issues and questions (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958), and they typically apply such newfound skills at great length, ruminating about abstract but highly personal questions and concerns, such as: Who am I? What kind of person am I? How do I compare? Where do I fit in? How do others see me? Provision of positive answers to such questions is vital for ensuring good mental health during adolescence. And since the most nearly universal demand and expectation of youth in our culture is to attend and succeed in school, positive answers must be provided largely within the context of the school environment.

The need to engender feelings of competence in school is also vital because of the consequences which follow from a failure to engender such feelings. Social psychologists have discovered that there are a number of different strategies regularly resorted to by individuals who have learned to expect failure, in order to protect their self-esteem (Major, 1987; Major, Cozzarelli, & Testa, 1987; Rhodewalt, 1987). Several of these strategies are commonly observed in the secondary school setting, with adverse consequences both for the school and for the student.

The first such self-protective strategy is to denigrate or devalue the activity at which one anticipates failure. Thus, students in whom the schools have engendered feelings of academic incompetence are frequently observed to deprecate school or to down-play the importance of academics. In addition, since it is frequently considered preferable within the adolescent culture to be seen as bad rather than as dumb, many adolescents who anticipate academic failure attempt to pre-empt the issue by actively misbehaving or resisting instruction, thereby transforming the overt issue from one of ability, competence, and success to one of behavior, attitude, and intent. Either apathy or acting out in the classroom may represent misguided efforts to maintain self-esteem in the face of underlying feelings of incompetence and insecurity.

A second common strategy to avoid self-esteem debilitation in the face of anticipated failure is to provide oneself with an excuse for failure before the fact. Such strategies, commonly referred to as pre-handicapping strategies, would include, for example, neglecting to study for a test, obtaining insufficient sleep the night before a test, taking drugs the day of a test, or failing to make an effort while taking a test. Any subsequent test failure, then, can be attributed to such negative factors rather than to ability or other intrinsic characteristics, thus permitting maintenance of a degree of self-esteem. Unfortunately, many students' histories have led them to conclude that its better simply not to try than to try and fail; such students may consequently adopt pre-handicapping behaviors as a chronic way of life.

Finally, further loss of self-esteem by individuals lacking self-confidence may be prevented by minimizing their exposure to the situation in which failure is anticipated. For the student with feelings of academic incompetence, this readily translates into recurrent tardiness, an inordinate number of absences, school refusal, or simply dropping out of school altogether.

Feelings of Power

The third of the four sources of self-esteem posited by Coopersmith is a feeling of power, defined as "the ability to influence and control others." The individual high in self-esteem believes that he/she can have an effect, a meaningful impact, on other people and on his/her environment. High self-esteem implies feelings of control, of self-determination, and of autonomy.

Adolescents are typically very concerned with questions of control, autonomy, and relative status. This concern likely stems in part from the cognitive transformations mentioned earlier; as adolescents become capable of considering abstract, imaginary, or ideal situations as well as actual or existing ones, they become able to project themselves into the future and to imagine themselves as adults (Breger, 1974). At times, they may overapply this newfound skill, acting as though adult status has already been achieved and expecting to be treated as being adults. This expectation is also made possible by the fact that adolescents in our society have "marginal status" (Lewin, 1948), that is, they possess neither true adult status nor status as children, occupying instead a rather nebulous and ill-defined intermediate position. Recollection of one's own adolescence will, in all likelihood, confirm the typical adolescent desire for autonomy and adulthood, the utter distaste for being treated as a child, and the attraction toward those treating one as mature, responsible, and autonomous.

This normal, non-pathological concern with autonomy and control is often observed in clinical work with families, during disagreements over curfews, for example. If one attends closely to a family's squabbles over what time Timmy or Rachel need be home on a given Saturday night, it frequently becomes apparent that one factor affecting the intensity of feelings over the issue is a disparity in the perceptions of what the issue truly is. For while the parents commonly see the question in the narrow terms of "When will Timmy/Rachel be home this Friday?", for the adolescent the issue in question may be framed as a far more general and significant one, approximated by "Do my parents still control me? Am I autonomous? Am I considered mature? Do others think of me as a child? Am I in control of my own life?" Given this interpretation of what is being decided, the adolescent's intense feelings on the matter are perhaps not so surprising. Failing to grasp this, however, parents typically have difficulty comprehending why the issue of this Friday's curfew should arouse such strong feeling.

The failure of school personnel to appreciate the normal adolescent desire for self-determination can similarly result in otherwise avoidable power struggles. Unfortunately, as several authors have pointed out (e.g., Barth, 1980; Silberman, 1970), although in theory students are considered capable of handling ever greater degrees of freedom as they mature, in practice the educational system demands greater conformity and imposes more stringent regulation at higher grade levels. As Silberman expresses it, "Because adolescents are harder to 'control' than younger children, secondary schools tend to be even more repressive than elementary schools; the values they transmit are the values of docility, passivity, conformity, and lack of trust" (Silberman, 1970, p. 324).

In the Oregon high school survey mentioned earlier, only 26% of the students agreed with either of the following two items: "I have influence on the decisions within the school which directly affect me" and "I feel that if I think a program or school policy needs changing, I can have some effect in getting those changes made" (Jones, 1980). This would seem to indicate that three out of every four students in that system felt powerless to affect significant aspects of their school environment.

The potential seriousness of this deficiency may be inferred from the extensive studies by Martin Seligman and others (Seligman, 1975), demonstrating that an absence of perceived control and the feelings of powerlessness which ensue regularly result in extraordinary stress, hopelessness, apathy, and depression, in animals and in people. Moreover, such feelings and perceptions, once produced, are extremely hard to eradicate. Not surprisingly, given the destructive effects of perceived powerlessness, there is evidence that providing students with a significant role in decision making is associated with improved behavior (Cox, 1978; Duke & Perry, 1978; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979) and a more positive school climate (Beane, 1979; Breckenridge, 1976; Urich & Batchelder, 1979).

This is most certainly not to imply that we should turn over responsibility for running the schools to students, but merely to suggest that neither should students experience all decision making and authority as arbitrarily imposed by adults. We would not expect students to learn to solve algebraic equations if we simply handed them all the answers, nor would we expect them to puzzle out the correct procedures entirely on their own, without instructional assistance. In the same way, we should not expect students to learn self-responsibility either through the authoritarian imposition of rules, standards, and program decisions by others or through the granting of absolute freedom and self-determination to students themselves. Rather, students should be granted a meaningful degree of input, control, and authority within specified, important areas of school life and with non-authoritarian but readily available adult guidance, support, and co-operation.

Feelings of Virtue

The final facet of high self-esteem, according to Coopersmith's formulation, is a feeling of virtue. Virtuousness is defined as "adherence to moral and ethical standards"; the person with high self-esteem is likely to act in a manner congruent with accepted standards of behavior and in a fashion consistent with self-acceptance.

There exist a great many systems and procedures for modifying behavior or fostering values within the school setting. Several types of psychotherapeutic approaches, behavior modification strategies, and values clarification activities have been proposed, implemented, and evaluated within the schools. Many have been demonstrated to be efficacious methods for enhancing school adjustment and deportment. The use of such approaches can clearly assist students in maintaining adherence to the moral and ethical standards of their school.

As will be evident in later sections, however, the approach to virtue taken here is somewhat different. Feelings of virtue, as a source of high self-esteem, are held to be best engendered, not by the mere elimination of inappropriate behaviors or anti-social attitudes, but rather by the attainment of a higher standard, that of being genuinely and actively helpful and nurturing to others. Only by achieving this higher standard, it is held, will individuals obtain sufficient feelings of virtue to produce a significant impact on their self-esteem. This has particular relevance to the resolution of adolescent self-esteem problems, since adolescents in our culture are only rarely presented with the opportunity to serve in an altruistic, supportive, or nurturing capacity toward others. The failure to provide such experiences squanders a most precious opportunity, to the detriment of both society and adolescent mental health.

Chapter 3

Relationship to Other Systems and Theories

There are several other systems and theories for conceptualizing human behavior and needs which bear a considerable similarity to Coopersmith's formulations on self-esteem. Because such congruity tends to provide additional validation of Coopersmith's findings and beliefs, and because some educators' existing familiarity with these other theories may facilitate the incorporation of Coopersmith's self-esteem theory into their thinking and work, the parallels between Coopersmith's model and these other theories will be examined in this chapter.

Dreikurs' Four Causes of Misbehavior

The strongest and most direct parallel appears to exist between Coopersmith's formulation and that of Rudolph Dreikurs (Dreikurs & Cassel, 1972). Dreikurs, who has written extensively on the applications of Alfred Adler's psychological theories to classroom behavior management, has posited that there are four "mistaken goals" of children's behavior problems which, taken together, are the source of all classroom behavior problems. He describes these four goals as attention-getting, power seeking, display of inadequacey, and revenge. It would appear, from his further descriptions, that these four causes of classroom misbehavior correspond quite closely to the four factors identified by Coopersmith, representing the inappropriate means to which children sometimes resort in attempting to meet their legitimate needs for significance, competence, power, and virtue. Indeed, Dreikurs' four factors are in many respects simply the obverse of Coopersmith's, with the latter representing the natural goals of people seeking to maintain their self-esteem and the former representing the hurtful and misdirected means commonly utilized by children in attempting to meet those goals when more appropriate means are lacking or blocked. As such, inappropriate attention-getting behavior may be seen to represent attempts to obtain feelings of significance in inappropriate ways. Displays of inadequacey are overt indications of feelings of incompetence. Provoking inappropriate power struggles is a maladaptive way to struggle against feelings of impotency. And engaging in deliberate revengeful or hurtful behavior suggests the absence of feelings of virtue.

While Dreikurs' and Coopersmith's views are in many respects interchangeable, the advantage of Coopersmith's formulation would appear to be the emphasis it places on the normal and salubrious aspects of drives to attain high self-esteem. The two theories correspond so closely, however, that educators trained in Dreikurs' model should find it a simple matter to incorporate Coopersmith's theory into their thinking, strategizing, and practices.

Glasser's Reality Therapy

Another well-known model of human behavior with similarities to the one presented here is that of William Glasser, particularly as put forth in his book Reality Therapy (Glasser, 1965). Glasser proposes that there are two basic psychological needs requisite to good mental health: the need to love and be loved and the need to feel worthwhile to oneself and to others. By the former, Glasser seems to mean something highly similar to what are here called feelings of significance; to be actively involved in a meaningful and mutually satisfying relationship with at least one other person, who sincerely cares about the given individual. The second of Glasser's two proposed needs corresponds roughly to a combination of competence and virtue; one comes to feel worthwhile to oneself and others, according to Glasser, by achieving success and by behaving responsibly.

While not explicitly addressed as a "need", Coopersmith's fourth source of self-esteem, personal power or potency, actually lies at the heart of Glasser's theoretical system. For reality therapy is firmly grounded in the belief that individuals have the power to choose their own behaviors, the ability to more responsibly meet their needs, and the capability of significantly improving their lives. Thus, taken in total, Glasser's view of the well-functioning person, one who has developed responsible and effective ways of meeting his or her needs, is that of a person who has attained feelings of significance, of competence, of virtue, and of power. This is also Coopersmith's description of the individual with high self-esteem. Educators used to working within Dr. Glasser's theoretical framework should also have little or no difficulty transferring their understanding of his system to the four-part model of self-esteem.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Mechanism

There is, in addition, at least one theory based on experimental research in psychology which bears a resemblance to, and partially confirms, Coopersmith's list of contributors to high self-esteem. The extensive laboratory research in this area has been summarized and organized into a cohesive, unified theory by the distinguished American psychologist Albert Bandura, under the rubric of what he terms "self-efficacy mechanism" or "self-percepts of efficacy" (Bandura, 1982). Self-percepts of efficacy refer to a person's beliefs as to whether he/she has the opportunity and the ability to deal effectively with a given challenge or situation. As such, perceived self-efficacy consists of a combination of what are here called feelings of competence and of potency.

The research by Bandura and others has clearly demonstrated that one's self-percepts of efficacy help to account for human behavior in widely diverse areas of functioning and are central to understanding people's thought patterns, emotional reactions, and behavioral responses. The importance of self-efficacy mechanisms has been demonstrated in phenomena as varied as "level(s) of physiological stress reactions,... resignation and despondency to failure experiences,... growth of intrinsic interest, and career pursuits."

Perhaps most importantly for the present purposes, research on self-efficacy has also demonstrated that with the proper interventions, one's feelings of competence and power can be increased. In the section to follow, possible strategies for enhancing not only students' feelings of competence and power but also of significance and virtue will be considered.

SECTION III

HELPING THE STUDENT WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Chapter 4

Recognizing Student Strengths and Abilities

In an ideal world, all students would obtain substantial feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue within the standard, academic secondary school program. And certainly there is a great deal which can and should be done concerning academic instruction in order to maximize student success. By varying the material to be presented, the mode and format of presentation, the rate of presentation, and other important teaching/learning variables, much can be done to more closely approximate the goal of engendering success and accomplishment by all students. This is important, among other obvious reasons, because a high academic success rate contributes to an enhanced self-concept (Bridgeman & Shipman, 1978; Kifer, 1975). But the reality is that there exist discrepancies in the learning abilities possessed by different students sufficient to place serious limitations on the capacity of some to secure feelings of high self-esteem based solely on traditional, academic accomplishment.

To overcome this limitation, what is required, first of all, is an entirely different perspective on the nature of individual differences among students. Rather than viewing such differences in terms of student placement along a single continuum of mental ability, educators need to develop an increased sensitivity to the various and sundry particular abilities which students possess. For as long as only differences in general mental ability are acknowledged and recognized, only those relatively few students highest in such general academic ability will attain high levels of educational self-esteem. But to the extent that broader and more varied types of abilities are recognized, encouraged, and rewarded, greater numbers of students will be able to develop a positive self-regard.

It is, secondly, imperative that in assessing student differences, educators be particularly attuned to recognizing student strengths and assets rather than simply their deficiencies. One cannot possibly raise a student's self-esteem by focusing solely, or even primarily, on his/her deficits and deficiencies. If one goal for a student, or for a student population, is an increase in self-esteem, then the accomplishment of that goal must include the recognition, development, and utilization of student strengths.

This is in many ways contrary to usual teaching practices. Almost by definition, teaching concerns itself primarily with weaknesses and deficits, not strengths and assets; one does not ordinarily teach a skill the learner already possesses, one teaches skills the learner cannot yet perform. Consequently, it is often not readily apparent to educational staff how to effectively utilize student strengths.

In the case of educationally handicapped students, for example, the development of their Individual Educational Plans typically requires a listing of student weaknesses and strengths, followed by specific educational goals and objectives. These goals and objectives should follow logically from the stated strengths and weaknesses of the individual student. In practice, however, the goals and objectives to be addressed most often relate exclusively to the student's areas of weakness; it is, after all, the weaknesses which are responsible for the student's identification as handicapped and which necessitate special forms of remediation. This part of the process is clear and logical. What is frequently far less evident is how to address or take advantage of student strengths. Often, staff do not know what role such listed assets should play in the development of the I.E.P. or how to incorporate student strengths into educational program planning in a systematic or strategic fashion.

The chapter to follow will provide a number of specific suggestions for utilizing student strengths in a sound, strategic manner. What is required first, however, is a clear understanding of the importance of individual student assets and abilities, as well as the ability to discern the particular strengths and abilities of each individual student. Educators should strive to develop an automatic and near-intuitive sensitivity to student strengths and a comprehensive understanding of how best to utilize them.

There is an often repeated anecdote concerning the celebrated hypnotist and psychotherapist Milton Erickson which clearly illustrates this principle. At the time, Dr. Erickson was taking over as the chief administrator of a psychiatric hospital ward, and as one of his first acts was touring the ward, introducing himself to the staff and patients he encountered. He shook hands with one such patient and said, "Hello, I am Dr. Erickson," only to have the patient respond in total seriousness, "Hello. I am Jesus Christ."

Never at a loss for words, Dr. Erickson quickly rejoined, "Oh. I understand you like to help people."

"Yes, I am always eager to help my fellow man."

"Good," responded Dr. Erickson. "And I understand you have a background in carpentry?"

"I do," replied the patient.

"Well, that's good, because I'm about to move into my new office, and I need someone to build me a book case."

Productive involvement in this useful activity, the feelings of competence, significance, and virtue which such activity engendered, and the status gained from having made the director's book shelves started the patient on the road to recovery, and in six months he was discharged.

Few, if any, of us will ever achieve Dr. Erickson's ability to perceive in such a quick and spontaneous fashion the positive potential inherent in any given individual or situation. This tale is illustrative, however, of the desirability of striving to emulate his ability. Only by recognizing individual student potential and providing the means through which such ability can be utilized, developed, and rewarded, can we hope to foster or enhance student self-esteem.

As John Gardner (1961) has pointed out, to the extent that schools are able to do this, everyone benefits: the student, the school, and society in general. Students benefit through increased feelings of success, recognition, and self-esteem. Schools benefit as a result of corresponding improvements in attitude, effort, and behavior on the part of their students. And society as a whole benefits, because it is in any society's best interests to enable each and every individual to develop and contribute his/her unique potentials and abilities, whatever they may be, to the utmost extent possible.

Systems for Identifying and Classifying Abilities

Students' strengths are in some ways highly individual and idiosyncratic, and their identification is often as much an art as a science. Nevertheless, systematic classifications of potential student assets can greatly assist in attempts to recognize student strengths in a reliable fashion. Classification systems can aid in the determination of strengths which might otherwise be overlooked, as well as in training staff to examine a wider variety of characteristics, in order to ascertain diverse student abilities.

There are three general areas which I have learned to consider in assessing student potential: the student's specific abilities or talents, his/her particular interests, and his/her personal traits and characteristics. A near-infinite number of possible specific assets and strengths fall within each of these three general categories. A few illustrative examples of specific abilities include mechanical aptitude, athletic skill, public speaking ability, artistic creativity, and talent for computer programming. Areas of student interest and acquired knowledge are likewise variable, ranging from sports to pets to dance to computers to rare coins to magic to first aid to child care. Positive personal characteristics include leadership ability, a desire to be helpful, social awareness, empathy, organizational ability, friendliness, or personal appeal. A strength in any of these areas - abilities, interests, or personal qualities - can serve as the basis for school-based experiences designed to enhance or strengthen self-esteem.

A more formal system for classifying strengths has been proposed by Howard Gardner (1983). Gardner, decrying the overly narrow and rigid way in which we have come to define and measure intelligence, has put forth a theory of "multiple intelligences." After examining a host of factors ranging from the neurological evidence for discrete abilities to the social utility of various skills, Gardner has concluded that there are, in fact, six different and discrete intelligences: linguistic intelligence, musical intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, and personal intelligence. Again, the presence of any of these various intelligences can serve as the basis for success and self-esteem.

The first of the listed intelligences, linguistic intelligence, refers to one's ability to use and understand written and spoken language. The student with strong linguistic skills can be expected to do well in courses stressing lecturing, reading comprehension, retention of printed material, or written expression. Because the standard and traditional curriculum of our schools is already so heavily oriented toward such tasks, most students with good linguistic abilities will perform quite successfully, and self-esteem problems will ordinarily be relatively limited among linguistically adept students. Occasionally, however, one does encounter a student whose linguistic skills have gone unrecognized or have been underutilized due to other interfering factors, such as shyness, lack of confidence, or personality aberrations. For instance, youth who have been generally unsuccessful educationally or socially due to eccentricity of behavior or expression, including schizophrenegenic youth, are sometimes found to be surprisingly good at writing poetry or at other forms of creative expression, if they are encouraged to engage in such activities. The same idiosyncratic patterns of verbal expression and the unique flow of verbal associations which cause them problems in the social and academic spheres may be utilized productively in more deliberately creative forms of verbal or written expression, thereby serving as a basis for success, recognition, and self-esteem enhancement.

The second of Gardner's intelligences, musical intelligence, refers to the ability to appreciate, compose, and perform either vocal or instrumental compositions. This form of intelligence is personified by musical prodigies such as Mozart, who was playing the piano at age three and composing at four. The story is told that the three year old Mozart was visiting people on a farm when he heard a pig squeal and immediately said, "G sharp." The note was then played on a piano, confirming the toddler's judgment.*

Logical-mathematical intelligence consists of the ability to use inductive and deductive reasoning. The individual high in this form of intelligence is adept at thinking problems through in a logical, linear, step-by step fashion. Mr. Spock, of Star Trek fame, perhaps epitomizes this form of intelligence. Educationally, mathematics, computer science, and analytical problem solving all directly involve these abilities.

Spatial intelligence is the ability to perceive and interpret spatial relationships and to manipulate objects in space. The ability to read maps or blueprints, to organize bulletin boards or displays, to draft plans and diagrams, and to assemble shop class projects are all manifestations of spatial intelligence. Spatial intelligence is the one aspect of intellectual functioning besides verbal intelligence which can be assessed relatively well with existing testing instruments.

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*The consideration of such prodigies' remarkable rates of achievement can often cause inferiority feelings in the rest of us. As the musician and comedian Tom Lehrer once joked, "It is a humbling thought, for example, to realize that by the time he was my age, Mozart had already been dead for three years!"

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence refers to one's physical dexterity, sensitivity to proprioceptive cues, and ability to coordinate multiple muscle groups. The person high in bodily-kinesthetic intelligence has the ability to maintain an accurate sense of his/her body position in space and to perform well-coordinated physical movements simultaneously involving different muscle groups. Dancers and athletes have a high degree of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. An extremely wide range of bodily-kinesthetic dexterity is observed among adolescents. The rapid growth and other physical changes which generally accompany adolescence sometimes result in a period of clumsiness and awkwardness; the rapid lengthening of limbs, for instance, makes it temporarily more difficult to predict one's position in space, resulting in tipped over salt shakers, a gawky gait, and the like. This increased awkwardness in certain youngsters may be a factor in the admiration and status frequently accorded those peers who retain or develop superior athletic skills.

Youth high in the final type of intelligence, personal intelligence, have an unusually good understanding of themselves and others. They not only have good self-insight but are equally adept at understanding the motivations of others. They are able to empathize, to read social cues, and to resond effectively to other people. They are "people persons."

The presence of any one of these multiple intelligences or of other, more specific abilities, interests, or personal qualities can serve as the basis for educational experiences designed to foster increased self-esteem. What this demands is an appropriate match between a student's strengths, on the one hand, and available school resources, on the other, in order to maximize success and to produce feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue.

Chapter 5

Available School Resources and Approaches

Having examined the varieties of student strengths and abilities which can serve as sources of self-esteem, it is now time to consider what resources and options are typically available in secondary schools which can be utilized to exercise, develop, and display those strengths.

When I was a graduate student, one of my supervisors admonished his students that whenever they entered a new school system they should quickly and invariably seek to determine what resources were available to them and to the youth whom they would be serving. Being a very traditionally oriented clinician, he meant by "resources" resources outside of the school: mental health clinics, hospitals, social service agencies, and the like. It is my equally strong admonition to all those working in the public schools that they become cognizant of the many resources _within_ their school which are available for providing experiences which will bolster student self-esteem. Some of the possibilities for doing so will be discussed in this chapter. It should be noted that all the alternatives to be discussed have proven to be useful in improving the self-esteem of selected youngsters in my personal experience.

Peer and Cross-Age Tutoring

One unsurpassed and underutilized resource for enhancing self-esteem is the opportunity for students to teach or tutor other students. The advantages of such approaches to the tutee may be self-evident, but consider also the effect of such activity on the student tutors. Successful participation in tutoring another student over a prolonged period enables the tutor to experience all four sources of high self-esteem. Meaningful involvement in such a productive, co-operative, one-to-one relationship engenders strong feelings of significance. Since the tutoring student is now in the position of teacher and authority rather than that of submissive learner, he/she experiences feelings of competence and power. And by being directly and actively helpful to another, the student acquires legitimate and well-earned feelings of virtue.

It is, therefore, not surprising that empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the value of both peer tutoring and cross-age tutoring programs. Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik (1982), for example, performed a meta-analysis of 65 peer tutoring studies and concluded that such programs result in increased mastery of the subject area and improved attitude toward the subject area on the part of both tutors and tutees. Greenwood, Carter, and Hall (1988) have more recently reviewed the literature on peer tutoring and have come to very similar conclusions. And Maher (1982) has found that organized tutoring programs with behaviorally disturbed adolescents serving as the trained tutors result in improved attendance, behavior, and academic achievement on the part of the tutors.

One particularly instructive example of the efficacy of such approaches from my own experiences occurred in connection with a middle school youth who exhibited recurrent behavior problems, had a negative attitude toward school with limited academic motivation, and seemed destined for retention due to minimal academic effort in school and a near-total failure to complete homework assignments. Detentions served after school, individual and parent counselling, and special behavioral contracts had all been tried with little discernible success. Finally, the middle school principal hit upon the idea of having the captain of the high school basketball team, a student of recognized high status, tutor the youth. It was arranged that the older student would meet two or three times per week with the younger student to help him organize his work, to ensure that assigned work had been completed, and to help him study and prepare for upcoming tests and quizzes.

This approach succeeded where others had failed. The rate of homework completion increased dramatically, behavior problems decreased, and the student's grades improved. Moreover, the experience was self-esteem enhancing for both of the adolescents. The younger student obtained strong feelings of significance because of the active interest taken in him by the older, high status high school student. As his grades improved, he began to feel more competent and, presumably, his behavioral changes enabled him to feel more virtuous as well. Meanwhile, the older student's selfsteem also benefitted immeasurably. Merely being asked for his assistance provided ego-enhancement; after all, he was being told that he could succeed where middle school staff had failed. Moreover, he was being valued for something quite different from his usual role as star athlete. And, as with most tutoring situations, the tutoring relationship and activity themselves fostered feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue.

There are innumerable opportunities for the use of such procedures within any school. Such opportunities should be fully exploited, to the benefit of all concerned.

Staff Assistance

While peer or cross-age tutoring allows students to feel useful and helpful towards other students, feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue can also often be fostered in situations which allow students to be of service to school staff. Assisting staff in their work with younger students enables secondary students to fulfill their self-esteem needs simultaneously with regard to both older and younger individuals. A student involved in such an experience develops a meaningful relationship with, and is genuinely helpful to, both an adult staff member and younger, more dependent children.

There is a wide diversity of staff with whom adolescents can be appropriately matched in such approaches. One natural resource for this strategy, because his/her acceped role is by its nature a nurturing one, is the School Nurse. Serving as a School Nurse's aide has been a successful and ego-enhancing experience for many adolescents I have known. This role seems to be especially conducive to self-esteem enhancement when the adolescent can assist a Nurse serving, at least in part, an elementary school population. Even some seemingly hardened adolescents will respond in a nurturing, supportive way in dealing with the daily assortment of cuts, scrapes, aches, and pains presented by younger students. Such service, which can prove of genuine help to busy nurses and injured children alike, allows the adolescent to experience feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue. Moreover, in cases where such young children are not involved, the mere assumption of a quasi-adult role as Nurse's aide can foster similar feelings, even if the actual job duties consist of activities such as filing, copying, and answering the phone.

Other ancillary staff offer similar opportunities for the productive involvement of adolescent students in self-esteem inducing activities. Physical education, music, and art teachers as well as School Librarians can all benefit from student assistance in ways that are also conducive to adolescent mental health. Students should be matched with such staff on the basis of the student's individual interests, knowledge, and aptitudes. In this manner, students may express and utilize their own competencies in a way which also fosters interpersonal relationships.

Again, the ideal situation is often one which allows the adolescent involvement with younger, less highly skilled students as well as with an adult supervisor. Such situations not only foster the four sources of high self-esteem but also provide an adult role model and mentor in an area of competence and motivation. Many academically undermotivated, athletically inclined adolescents, for example, will more readily acknowledge the importance of education or the value of continued schooling in discussion with someone perceived to have similarities to the student, to be employed in the field of athletics, and to therefore have high credibility, such as a physical education teacher or coach, than in discussions with others.

Serving as a classroom assistant or teacher's aide in an elementary school classroom represents another highly efficacious and underutilized strategy for engendering feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue in adolescent students. Students engaged in such an endeavor almost inevitably come to feel helpful, mature, special, and involved in a way that is rarely possible within more typical adolescent experiences. Feelings of engagement and affection are reciprocated by the elementary students in a manner that is bound to affect favorably the adolescent's view of him/herself.

Some adolescents will respond favorably to the opportunity to assist a school's cook or custodian. Certainly this option will have no appeal for many relatively sophisticated adolescents, but with the proper match such service can prove efficacious. I have even known such arrangements to be effective motivators for other behaviors. Another School Psychologist once consulted with teachers concerning a sixth grade girl who was markedly deficient in her rate of classroom work completion. A great many interventions had already been implemented with little discernible effect. After speaking with the student, the School Psychologist suggested to teachers that the girl be allowed to spend fifteen minutes cleaning the lunchroom tables prior to lunch, contingent upon her having completed that morning's math assignments. School staff were skeptical, to say the least, that after so many other interventions had been attempted without success, the opportunity to wipe a wet dish rag over some tables would actively motivate the girl. Nevertheless, the Psychologist insisted that this activity was, in fact, the only one for which the girl showed any enthusiasm, and staff agreed to try it.

The intervention was a success: the girl consistently completed a reasonable number of math assignments. Upon closer examination, a number of factors appeared to account for the motivating properties of this activity. First, the girl was clearly capable of cleaning the tables; in this situation she felt competent and powerful. Second, she perceived that she was truly being helpful; she felt virtuous. Third, the opportunity to perform such work was unique to her; she felt special. And finally, she received attention and pampering from the two matronly cooks during her time alone with them in the lunchroom; she felt significant.

I have known the opportunity to work with School Custodians to be similarly motivating to selected students for similar reasons. I mention the motivating quality of such assistance not necessarily to indicate that participation in such activities be made contingent on behaviors in other areas but simply as evidence of the appeal of such ego-enhancing activities for students. The decision whether to make participation in staff assistance by students who are otherwise unsuccessful contingent or non-contingent on improved behavior is occasionally problematic and is dependent on a host of individual factors. In general, if one believes in the model of self-esteem development presented here, recognizes the benefits of such approaches to the overall mental health of students, and expects to obtain long-term improvements by adhering to self-efficacy development strategies, then one will usually allow participation free of prerequisite contingencies. Occasionally, however, the student is better served by utilizing such approaches to motivate badly needed improvements in academic effort or behavior in addition to fostering self-esteem. Sometimes it is possible to have the advantages of both strategies, by making a certain amount of participation automatic, with the chance to earn additional participation through meeting specified contingencies.

For example, an athletic student with insufficient academic motivation can assist a Physical Education instructor twice a week, as part of his/her regular schedule; by meeting certain specified standards in a given week's academic classes, she/he can earn to assist during two additional periods. This arrangement provides motivation for making important improvements in academic effort but does not thereby risk the absolute withdrawal of activities important to self-esteem.

Other Forms of Assistance

Adolescents in our culture generally have far too few opportunities to be actively, genuinely helpful to others. This may well be a contributory factor in the frequency of mental health and behavioral difficulties in the adolescent population. In many instances, one way to help an adolescent is to allow him/her to help others.

Within any public school there are innumerable situations in which students could be of genuine assistance to staff, to other students, or to the general community. Many tasks which staff find to be tiresome, onerous, or trivial can be efficiently done by students, with a consequent increase in feelings of significance, competence, potency, and virtue. Again, such activities should be undertaken by individual students based on student interests, characteristics, and aptitudes. Examples of such activities include typing, filing, maintaining book lists, answering phones, showing visitors around the school, running errands, reading school announcements, maintaining or running audio-visual equipment, or putting up bulletin boards. The list could actually be as extensive as the list of activities which take place in a school. One can see even from this partial list that a host of different student strengths can be utilized for such purposes, for example manual abilities (typing, filing), interpersonal qualities such as friendliness and social adroitness (answering phones, escorting visitors) or helpfulness (running errands, maintaining book lists), mechanical intelligence (audio-visual assistance), reading and speaking abilities (reading announcements), and spatial/artistic aptitudes (designing bulletin boards).

One relatively recently available resource deserving special mention is the computer. An example from my personal experience may prove instructive and illustrative of several points. Peter was a middle school student who had been identified from a very early age as having serious emotional difficulties. At the time I came to know him he had an extremely marginal school adjustment, and out-of-district special placements were sporadically considered for him. He exhibited several unusual mannerisms and absessions, was struggling academically despite above average intelligence, threw vigorous temper tantrums when disciplined or frustrated, and was socially isolated and rejected. His inordinately high level of social anxiety and his unusual, idiosyncratic, and stereotyped interests and thought patterns interfered with the development of positive relations with peers.

On the other hand, Peter was unusually skilled in writing and running computer programs. The same overly rote and stereotyped thought processes which interfered with his affective and interpersonal development were highly applicable and productive when applied to computer programming. Moreover, interacting with a computer did not arouse the kind of interfering social anxiety as did interactions with people. Spending many of his free periods in the computer room, Peter was increasingly relied upon by other students for help in writing, running, or debugging their programs. Through conversations about the relatively neutral and non-threatening topic of computer programming, Peter began to converse more easily with his classmates and to be seen by them in a more positive light. He achieved, at last, a positive role within the school, he was socially better accepted, he developed increased social and academic self-confidence, and he became more normalized, age-appropriate, and self-possessed in his behavior. I lost contact with Peter at this point but was gratified to note in subsequent years that his name was included in the school's Honor Roll in the local newspaper.

With Peter, one key to the effectiveness of the computer lay in the neutral, mechanical, and automatic nature of the computer's feedback, which aroused no defensiveness or social anxiety. Austin and Holowenzak (1985) have found that a great many students profit from doing work on the computer for similar reasons. The computer makes no judgments on them academically; it merely tells them their answer is wrong and offers another chance. Feedback is neutral and devoid of evaluative connotations. Also, consistent with the usefulness of Peter's suggestions to other students, it has been determined that two or three students working on a computer achieve greater learning than students working individually (Austin, 1984; Austin & Holowenzak, 1985). Like Peter, other students with strengths in logical-mathematical intelligence may also benefit both themselves and others through the active sharing of their skills and competencies.

Many other forms of service raising student self-esteem involve a greater cross-age component. It has been my observation that teens in need of nurturance can typically fill that need in either of two ways - by being nurtured or by nurturing others. Students benefit greatly when provided with the opportunity to teach, help, or support other individuals who are less mature, less capable, or needier than themselves. Thus, adolescent self-esteem rises through expereince as an assistant in a day care center, as a Big Brother/Big Sister to an elementary school student, through serving in a nursing home for the elderly, or through participation in an "Adopt a Grandparent" program. Such possibilities can be fostered and formalized by secondary school staff to encourage adolescent involvement in community service. Such programs also offer the opportunity for incorporating related didactic material, on child development or communication skills for example, as well.

Display of Talents

Another way to enhance an adolescent's self-esteem is to provide opportunities for him/her to actively demonstrate his/her abilities or achievements directly. This occurs regularly, for example, in athletics; students with abilities in bodily-kinesthetic intelligence can demonstrate their abilities before large audiences, through participation in team sports. Schools need to provide students whose abilities lie in other areas with similar forums and opportunities to display their expertise, talents, or productions.

Students with superior spatial abilities, for example, can be asked to set up bulletin boards, to decorate hallways, to design scenery or costumes for the school play, or to create a school logo. Displays of their art work can be arranged in the school or in the community (in the public library, for instance). They can be involved in illustrating school yearbooks, newspapers, parent newsletters, or other publications. One seemingly highly alienated and disaffected boy responded very favorably to being asked to stencil new hallway signs for his school ("Visitors Please Report to the Office", "Fire Exit", "Nurse's Office", etc.).

He not only spent many periods in the Guidance Office cheerfully and productively engaged in making the signs, but as his handiwork began to appear around the school for all to see, his affect, attitude toward school, attendance, and behavior all showed substantial improvement.

Opportunities should likewise be provided for students whose abilities lie in the musical or other performing arts-related areas to exercise and demonstrate their abilities. Such students can be encouraged to perform at school assemblies, to sing or play the National Anthem before school sporting events, to participate in school talent shows, or to join the dramatics club. (The latter two activities also provide the opportunity for students with leadership skills or organizational ability to help in planning and organizing the events and for those with spatial skills to design scenery, costumes, etc.)

The school newspaper provides a format for students with good linguistic intelligence to display their writing abilities. Students with exemplary personal intelligence can, under the guidance of a staff member, write a "Dear Abby"-type advice column regarding student-submitted problems. And students possessing an area of special interest, knowledge, or expertise can be asked to write an article on that particular subject.

Curricular and Extra-curricular Approaches

There are also available within standard curricular and extra-curricular offerings a number of programming options which can be used to increase feelings of success, involvement, and competence in students. The most obvious of these are the variety of vocational and pre-vocational classes which can be offered. When based on a proper match with the student's interests, aptitudes, and personal characteristics, such training affords greater opportunities for success on the part of selected students than does the more standard academic curriculum. Work/study programs offer similar advantages to certain students. Mentorship programs can be especially valuable, in that they not only allow for graduated and successful occupational experiences but can also provide a meaningful interpersonal aspect, engendering feelings of significance as well as of competence.

Extra-curricular special interest clubs and activities can also be beneficial sources of increased self-esteem. Involvement with others having similar or identical interests can provide a youth with friendships, with a sense of belonging, and with validation that others find value in what he/she likes and does. Those who attain prominence or positions of leadership in the group also attain feelings of competence and power. The wider the array of such groups or activities that are available, the greater will be the number of students attaining such feelings. Students whose interests are too unique or idiosyncratic to form the basis of a group activity can be asked to present reports or demonstrations to a class covering a related subject matter, where appropriate.

Finally, mention should be made of the fact that there also exist many resources outside of the school which can be used to help adolescents gain feelings of significance, competence, power, or virtue. The Scouts, summer baseball leagues, YMCA/YWCA's, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters represent familiar examples of such community resources; many students can be assisted toward greater self-esteem by enrollment in these or other programs outside of school. On the other hand, persons from the community can be brought into the school to assist youth as well. Senior volunteers can tutor or otherwise work with designated students, individuals with expertise in high interest areas can run extracurricular clubs or activities, interesting or successful speakers can address classes, and so on.

Such approaches can be of great benefit; however, two cautions are in order. First, community volunteers should not be used to perform services which students themselves could do. It has already been noted that tutoring other students, assisting staff, etc. can be of tremendous benefit to the self-esteem of selected students, and, thus, they should be utilized first when assigning such tasks. Second, although many activities and resources outside the school have a potential for bolstering self-esteem, staff should always consider first what resources are available within the school for accomplishing the same goal. For while resources either within or outside the school can foster self-esteem, only the provision of satisfying and success-inducing experiences within the school has the additional benefit of improving the student's attitude toward school itself.

Chapter 6

Applications to Particular Student Problems

What types of students are likely to benefit from activities such as those just described? Actually, any student can profit from participation in suitably selected activities designed to enhance self-esteem, since anyone will benefit from increased feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue. Not surprisingly, then, studies show that opportunities for student success in school and extra-curricular activities correlate with school climate, student satisfaction, and achievement (Anderson, 1985). Not just academically unsuccessful students benefit from engaging in such activities; prolonged, successful participation in extra-curricular activities is one of the four factors found to enhance predictions of subsequent college success, beyond that predicted by high school grades and S.A.T. scores (Willingham, 1985). There is also reason to believe that such persistant involvement in special activities is related to future success more generally (Boyer, 1987).

Such approaches are especially vital, however, for the persistantly troubled or troubling adolescent student. Provision of the types of experiences suggested in the previous chapter is an essential element in any school-based solution to the following four classes of student problems.

The Behavior Problem Student

Brophy and Rohrkemper (1981) have demonstrated that teachers tend to respond differently to students whose emotional difficulties result in internalizing types of behaviors (e.g., daydreaming, depression) and to those exhibiting more externalizing forms of misbehavior (e.g., attention-getting, expressions of anger). Responses to the former typically include long-term attempts to improve mental health (by providing support and encouragement, referral to counselling services, etc.), while responses to the latter are generally characterized soley by disciplinary activity and/or resignation to the problem. This is unfortunate, as the underlying causes of the two forms of problem behaviors share much in common. We know, for example, that childhood and adolescent depression typically parallels adult forms of depression, but that childhood and adolescent depression frequently also includes an aggressive, acting out component which can mask the underlying depression (Malmquist, 1972). Both internalizing and externalizing types of difficulties may be both cause and effect of low self-esteem, and efforts to raise self-esteem should be one focus of interventions to deal with acting-out forms of behavior, as well as of interventions with students whose problems have a more overt self-esteem component.

The persistantly misbehaving student almost invariably has low self-esteem, since students who expect to achieve significance, compotence, power, and virtue in school through the usual and accepted channels have no reason to act out. (Recall, for instance, that the presence of these four self-esteem factors obviates all four sources of classroom misbehavior according to Dreikurs' model.) Even in cases where physical, rather than psychological, factors may have originally precipitated the ongoing misbehavior (e.g., in students with Attention Deficit Disorder), the consequent misbehavior, frequent need for discipline, and lack of educational and social success eventually result in low self-esteem, which then becomes a problem in its own right.

Beyond doubt, the misbehaving student needs and requires disciplinary consequences for inappropriate behavior, but the persistance and intractibility of such behaviors in certain students indicates that for them such approaches alone are not sufficient. Moreover, the application of punitive consequences alone cannot conceivably accomplish one highly desirable goal, that of engendering a more positive attitude toward school. For students whose misbehavior proves refractory to the usual disciplinary techniques one must consider whether unmet emotional needs may be generating such behaviors: specifically, the needs to feel significant, competent, powerful, and virtuous. Such students will require techniques like those suggested in the previous chapter if long-term improvements are to be achieved.

The Unmotivated Student

Any experienced teacher is only too familiar with the undermotivated student. This is the student of whom it has been said, "When it comes to the battle of learning, he has declared himself a pacifist, a veritable conscientious objector." On a theoretical level, it is frequently held that self-esteem issues lie at the heart of such behavior. Some students hold such a low opinion of themselves that they feel unworthy or undeserving of success and therefore fail to seek it. Other students are sorely lacking in confidence and feelings of self-efficacy; their expectations of failure prevent them from risking a genuine effort.

In order to increase academic effort in such students one must find a way to generate increased enthusiasm and greater self-confidence. This can be done in part by incorporating into their program activities which directly engage the student's interests and strengths. It helps such students a great deal to have at least one (hopefully, more than one) aspect of their school day which they enjoy, anticipate with pleasure, experience as successful, and respond to with pride.

If an appropriate activity is found for such a student, the question then arises whether participation in the activity should be made contingent on acceptable performance in the rest of the student's program. As noted previously, this is often a difficult issue to decide; it rests on highly individual factors, and its resolution for a particular case is more of an art than a science. In general, if one has sufficient faith in the model of adolescent needs presented here and belief in the importance of significance, competence, power, and virtue to mental health generally, he/she may decide to provide such experiences independent of performance elsewhere. In many cases, however, some contingencies can be set by staff and met by students such that the student will increase academic effort in order to participate in the more desied activity. This latter approach is consistent with the well-establishec Premack Principle (Premack, 1959), which states that the opportunity to engage in frequently chosen behaviors can be used to reinforce less readily engaged in behaviors. In addition, if this approach succeeds, the increased academic success further enhances self-esteem. Nevertheless, such a strategy inevitably runs the risk of the student neither improving academically nor participating in the (unearned) self-esteem boosting activity.

This dilemma is presently most often encountered regarding participation on school athletic teams; if a student's grades are very low, should he/she be restricted from athletic competition? Typically, the student who falls below specific guidelines is automatically restricted from continued participation. Unfortunately, the student is usually restricted from participation for the duration of the season or during the entire next marking period if previous grades were too low. For some students, this results in irrevocable loss of their one authentic source of success and self-esteem for an extended period of time. A less detrimental alternative for students who are successful athletically but unsuccessful academically would be suspension from competition for a briefer period, during which they would have the opportunity to improve their academic effort in a planned and highly specified way. This remedial plan could include specific, measurable goals regarding changed study habits, participation in tutoring, or improved test scores, for example, depending on an analysis of the particulars for a given student. In this way academic deficiencies could be addressed without resorting to long-term withdrawal of the student's most successful experience.

Another form of compromise arrangement is sometimes possible with the academically under-motivated student who experiences self-esteem enhancement through participation in an activity such as those described in the previous chapter. Rather than addressing the issue in an all-or-none fashion (i.e., should or shouldn't the student be allowed to participate in a special, self-esteem developing activity while not succeeding in his/her academic classes?), it is often possible to maintain the advantages of both sides of the issue. The student can be regularly scheduled for, say, two periods a week of the activity on a non-contingent basis but be allowed to earn additional time in a given week through satisfactory performance of the crucial academic behavior(s) for that week. In this way, motivation is engendered for greater academic effort without running the risk that the student will lose altogether the special experience designed to enhance self-esteem.

The Frequently Absent or Tardy Student

Approaches to the student who is persistantly absent must also include provision of experiences which are compatible with the student's interests and aptitudes. If school is to have sufficient positive attraction for such a student, the school must provide a means for the student to meet his/her need to feel important, successful, and involved. Students who expect to obtain feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue on a daily basis in school are highly unlikely to avoid it; once again, the provision of experiences designed to foster such feelings are essential.

A modification of this strategy is in order with regard to the frequently tardy student. Not only should an appropriate, enjoyable, self-esteem enhancing activity be arranged for such students, but scheduling such activities during the first period of the day should seriously be considered. Scheduling the desired activity at the beginning of the day provides an inducement to punctual arrival and a natural, automatic consequence for tardiness; if tardy, the student misses the activity for that day. Tardiness no longer necessitates arbitrarily imposed consequences but rather carries its own automatic, logical, and meaningful consequence, the inability to participate due to absence during the activity itself. This helps to defuse conflict between the school administration and the youth and begins to shift responsibility for behavior and its consequences from the school to the student.

The Depressed Student

The final category of student problem for which self-esteem enhancement is a necessary factor in its solution is that of the depressed student. This is evident from the fact that depression is, in many respects, the precise opposite of high self-esteem, as defined here. For what are the feelings of the seriously depressed individual? The depressed person feels insignificant as opposed to significant; feels inadequate rather than compotent; feels hopeless rather than potent; and feels worthless rather than virtuous. Thus, to the extent that schools can provide a depressed student with experiences which directly engender feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue, they are actively and meaningfully contributing to the amelioration of the depression. Depression will not dissipate until the student comes to feel more involved, successful, capable, and useful.

Of course, counselling or psychotherapy is also often indicated for such students; this may occur either within or outside the school. But the provision of activities such as those suggested in the foregoing chapter, appropriately selected according to the strengths and needs of the particular student, can best, and sometimes only, be done within the school. Such approaches are education's unique and valuable contribution to the solution of adolescent depression and should always be considered in programming for depressed youngsters.

Chapter 7

Self-Esteem Enhancement as a Preventive Strategy

There are many reasons to believe that increasing an individual's self-esteem can render him/her more resilient and less prone to emotional disturbance. The first of these is the inherent logic of the proposition that those relatively high in self-regard are less susceptible to debilitation by life's inevitable stresses and failures. Richard Gardner makes a similar point through use of a monetary analogy. Gardner notes that to a very wealthy person, the loss of $100 means extremely little. It has no effect on the individual's immediate life style and will scarcely be noted or regretted. On the other hand, the loss of $100 by a very poor person may well prove devastating, conceivably even representing the difference between life and death. In the same way, logic suggests that an episode of failure or discouragement will prove far less detrimental to an individual with generally high self-esteem than to a person whose self-esteem is already tenuous or deficient.

As Bower (1980) points out, however, it is not enough for theories of preventive mental health to be logical in order to be judged correct. He notes that "...in colonial days Philadelphia health officials sought to prevent an epidemic of yellow fever by repeatedly firing a cannon from the steps of City Hall. This was certainly a unique preventive approach; however, it lacked any evaluation, since no one really knows how many mosquitoes were killed by this procedure." The logic which apparently led colonial Philadelphians to believe this to be an efficacious approach to prevention was faulty, and similarly the logical argument in favor of self-esteem enhancement as a preventive strategy, though sensible and persuasive, is insufficient.

A second reason for believing in the importance of self-esteem development to mental health is the tremendous frequency with which authors and researchers concerned with greatly varied aspects of human behavior ascribe to self-esteem a major contributing role in mental health or mental illness. Low self-esteem is almost invariably included in theoretical writings as being among the factors involved in the various diverse syndromes of emotional disturbance. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a form of emotional dysfunction that would not have disturbed self-esteem as either cause or consequence. Even highly specific and circumscribed forms of behavioral disturbance, with little or no overt relationship to self-esteem, may, in fact, either stem from or engender low self-regard. For example, it has recently been proposed that "Type A" behavior is a consequence of low self-esteem first manifested during adolescence which results in an overcompensating need for constant progress and achievement (Wright, 1988). And regarding one aspect of positive mental health, writers on creativity have frequently emphasized a need for high self-esteem and self-confidence, which allows the creative individual to tolerate ambiguities and the skepticism of other people (Coopersmith, 1981).

But again, the fact that many thoughtful and intelligent people believe a thing does not make it so. Aristotle taught that if two objects of different weights were dropped at the same time, the heavier one would hit the ground first, and, because it seemed sensible and because the great Aristotle said it, this was believed for 2,000 years. Only when Galileo conducted the actual experiment was the truth found to be quite otherwise. In the same way, we must look beyond appeals to intuition or to authorities in the field in order to assess the efficacy of self-esteem strategies in mental health promotion.

Empirical Evidence

Is there, then, any experimental evidence supporting the efficacy of self-esteem enhancement as a preventive strategy? There are, in fact, two different lines of evidence strongly suggesting the effectiveness of such an approach in preventing emotional or behavioral difficulties.

The first line of evidence consists of laboratory studies concerning the relationship between self-esteem and behavior. Coopersmith (1981), for example, utilized a technique first developed by Asch (1956) and adapted for use with children by Berenda (1950) to study the role of self-esteem in social conformity and decision-making. Children were placed one at a time in a situation where they had to state their judgment of the relative size of several straight lines. Unknown to the subject child, the other youngsters in each group were actually confederates of the experimenter and had been instructed to all give the same incorrect response on the majority of the comparisons. A measure was taken of how often each subject gave the correct answer and how often he conformed by giving the same incorrect response given by the others.

The results of the study indicated that individuals who were high or moderate in self-esteem were more likely to resist social pressures than those low in self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1981, p. 54). To the extent that many undesirable, unhealthy, or delinquent adolescent behaviors stem in part from capitulation to peer pressure, this study strongly suggests that remediation of low self-esteem will serve to prevent or attenuate such undesirable behaviors.

In another study, by Lesser and Abelson (1959), children were asked to rank the attractiveness of several pairs of paintings. Consistent with the results of Coopersmith's study, those children high in self-esteem were found to be less strongly influenced in their rankings by the rankings of a confederate adult than those low in self-esteem.

A second type of data supporting the preventive efficacy of the approaches taken in this book is found in a real-world study by Rutter and Quinton (Pines, 1984). They first identified a group of 90 female youth who were at risk for the development of subsequent emotional difficulties due to severely disruptive childhood histories. They then followed this group into early adulthood and found that, as expected, many of them had, in fact, become emotionally or behaviorally disturbed.

In examining what variables significantly differentiated between the groups of well-adjusted and maladjusted women, they found that two factors had had a preventive impact. The first, and most powerful, factor was marriage to a non-deviant spouse; women who had married a man who was himself relatively free of emotional or behavioral disturbance were less likely to evince emotional difficulties themselves than those who had not. The other variable which had a significant preventive effect was the presence of a successful educational experience during adolescence. Generally, the successful experience did not consist of global high achievement in school, but rather of a more specific experience much like those recommended in Chapter 5; the emotionally healthy women were more likely to have found an appropriate niche in school. In some cases their success consisted of high levels of performance in their area of greatest ability, in others of having developed an especially significant relationship with a particular staff member, in others of having achieved a position of prominence in a club or activity. In sum, Rutter and Quinton's work found a significant beneficial effect extremely consistent with the model and strategies presented here.

Expanding the Concept

It, therefore, appears that the utilization of strategies and resources suggested in this book have long-term as well as more immediate benefits to individuals and to society. There are constraints, however, on the use of such individualistic approaches to the prevention of student difficulties. Primary prevention requires not only such student-by-student strategies; it also requires large-scale preventive efforts, involving school-wide approaches and analyses of the educational system's role in self-esteem development.

If society desires to engender self-esteem and self-confidence in its youth and to decrease the prevalance of emotional disturbance, school is clearly the logical place to begin such efforts (Berkowitz, 1975; Kennedy, 1982). After all, school is the one place where virtually all children spend 6 hours per day, 5 days per week, 36 weeks per year, for 13 years. School is also where all children and youth have contact with trained professionals. And school is where a good part of a student's self-concept is formed. We need to consider, therefore, what effect various school qualities, practices, and procedures may have on the self-concept and self-esteem of a student body generally, if schools are to truly maximize their potential for positive impact.

Every school now has a multi-disciplinary team which meets to consider the strengths and weaknesses of individual educationally handicapped pupils and to develop an Individual Educational Plan designed to improve the student's functioning. Buktenica (1980) has recommended that schools likewise form a multi-disciplinary team similar to these ubiquitous Pupil Placement Teams but which would instead consider the strengths and weaknesses of the overall school program, identify program areas needing improvement, and formulate plans to achieve such improvements. This is a very apt and logical suggestion. The following chapters will look at school-wide variables which should be considered in examining a school's impact on student self-esteem.

SECTION IV

SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM VARIABLES RELATED TO STUDENT SELF-ESTEEM

Chapter 8

School Variables

School Size

One dimension along which American schools differ substantially is that of school size. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the effect of school size on student participation has been one of the more frequently researched issues in secondary education. Such studies (e.g., Barker & Gump, 1964; Lindsay, 1982; Morgan & Alwin, 1980; Wicker, 1968) have consistently indicated that, on average, students in small schools participate in more extra-curricular activities than do those in larger schools. It appears that within smaller schools, because there is a smaller pool of available students from which to draw, there is greater opportunity for, and increased pressure on, individual students to become involved in school activities. This affect is most pronounced for so-called "marginal" students (Karweit, 1983; Schaefer & Olexa, 1971; Wicker, 1971).

The implication of this finding for the model of self-esteem enhancement presented here would, thus, appear to be that smaller schools represent a preferable circumstance, since they result in increased student involvement in potentially ego-enhancing activities. Moreover, small schools, in allowing for a more personal atmosphere and a greater sense of community, would also seem to provide greater opportunities for the attainment of feelings of significance among students. It is, therefore, not surprising that problems such as absenteeism increase with increasing school size (Hannaway & Abramowitz, 1985). Against these factors must be balanced, however, the greater diversity of curricular and extracurricular options generally available in larger schools. An important educational goal should be to allow every student to find at least _one_ area of special success; the increased diversity of larger schools increases the chance of a school's achieving this mission. Thus, the effect of school size on student self-esteem may, in fact, be curvilinear. At the very least, the desiribility of large or small school size must be recognized to be a trade-off among factors.

One option being increasingly utilized to try to combine the distinct advantages of large and small schools is the concept of the mini-school or the "school within a school". It is hoped that by dividing large schools into several different sections which are self-contained for the basic academic classes but not for non-academic classes or for extra-curricular activities, students can be enabled to achieve membership in a relatively small, close-knit community while still having a full range of non-academic options available. Such an approach would be entirely congruent with the self-esteem model and self-esteem building strategies presented here, by providing for interpersonal significance and meaningful relationships within the self-contained unit as well as for the development and demonstration of competencies via the larger array of school-wide options.

School Location

Bronfenbrenner (1970), among others, has decried the extensive and increasing tendency toward age segregation within our culture. This tendency results in part from decreased family size and the absence of the extended family pattern of childrearing. As multi-generational family units become less common, children have less frequent contact with grandparents, and as parents have fewer children, there is less contact with siblings considerably older or younger than oneself. This diminished contact with older and younger individuals is additionally occasioned by contemporary school practices and programs. Not only are elementary, junior high, and senior high school populations segregated from each other, but even within each type of school, grade placements generally result in almost total age segregation.

In attempting to counteract this trend, there are definite advantages to locating schools of different levels (elementary, middle, and senior high) within close proximity to each other. Such proximity leads to increased cross-age contact generally and allows for greater flexibility in providing an accelerated curriculum for academically advanced students. Most pertinent to the present discussion, the proximity of younger students enables secondary school staff to enact many of the cross-age interventions suggested in Chapter 5 for developing feelings of helpfulness, power, and virtue. Unfortunately, a great many school systems deliberately avoid having younger and older students housed together for fear that the older students will negatively influence the younger; but this equally eliminates the potential for positive situations, interactions, and interventions to occur. For this reason, it is recommended that school districts embarking on new building projects attempt to house students of different age and grade levels in close geographical proximity.

School Design and Appearance

Architectural features of schools can also have often overlooked influences on students. As Winston Churchill observed, "We shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us." Among those who have written most knowingly of the psychological importance of architectural and spatial design is Bruno Bettelheim (1974). In his book Home for the Heart, Bettelheim goes to great lengths to describe the physical plant and decorative features of his Orthogenic School because he believes that the design and attractiveness of an institution can greatly affect those who live, work, or learn there, in their attitudes toward the institution and toward themselves.* Studies do, in fact, show that the decoration and care of a school and its classrooms (although not the school's age) are generally associated with higher achievement levels and a positive school climate (McDill & Rigsby, 1973; Phi Delta Kappa, 1980; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Weber, 1971).

It was suggested earlier that one way to foster higher self-esteem in students with artistic and spatial abilities is to involve them in school decoration and upkeep: painting hallway murals, designing bulletin boards, selecting color schemes, stencilling hallway signs, and so on. This provides students with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, increases their proprietary feelings toward the school, and keeps the school up-to-date, clean, and attractive for all. Other students respond well to jobs cleaning and maintaining school property. Increasing student responsibility in caring for school property can frequently lead to better behavior and decreased delinquent acts. Some schools have also reportedly reduced vandalism, particularly in the form of grafitti, by constructing or designating special grafitti walls on school grounds, which are then available for use by students in writing or drawing what they wish. Providing a recognized and acceptable format for such writings decreases unauthorized and delinquent forms of expression.

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*As just one of many examples, Dr. Bettelheim, who works in the psychoanalytic tradition, which places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of toilet training practices, states that it is important for childhood treatment facilities to have bathrooms which are unusually clean and inviting. One can only speculate on his probable reaction to the typical secondary school lavatory.

The physical layout and use of space within a school building also sometimes conveys important information to its students. What is prominent in the building? Do the main office and the guidance office have an "open door" for students? Are special education or vocational classes integrated with the rest of the building or are they relatively separate and hidden? All such factors may, subtley or blatantly, send messages to students concerning their perceived roles, value, and status, which in turn can affect student self-esteem.

Scheduling Procedures

There is much that can be done *via* a careful consideration of the most propitious class schedule for a given student to ensure his or her maximal success and consequent maximal self-esteem. The potential efficacy of student scheduling procedures may come as some relief to school guidance counsellors, who frequently feel that they have insufficient time for anything other than student scheduling. However, the degree of flexibility inherent in a particular school's class scheduling procedures can either impede or enhance the potential impact of such procedures.

One variable needing careful consideration in developing an optimal student schedule is the timing of classes within the day.

One previously mentioned example of this principle is the strategy of scheduling a persistantly tardy student's most appealing class during the first period, thereby ensuring that there is an automatic and natural consequence for on-time or tardy behavior. Another frequently useful scheduling procedure, for students who are active individuals having difficulty sitting and concentrating for long periods of time, is to alternate their relatively passive academic classes with hands-on, activity-based classes. This minimizes the length of time thay have to sit quietly for any single extended block of time.

Other, more individual strategies are also possible if we attend closely to individual student needs and if there is sufficient flexibility available in designing student schedules. Two examples from my experience may prove instructive, in that diametrically opposite strategies were used in the two cases, with beneficial results for both. In the first instance, Sally was a 15-year-old, 9th grade student who was experiencing both social and academic difficulties. She was generally somewhat immature, restless, and distractible and had considerable difficulty concentrating for extended periods of time. As a result, despite average intelligence she was having significant trouble performing up to expectations in her classes, especially in math. Following evaluation, a number of recommendations were made to the school, including provision of training in deep muscle relaxation techniques to allow her to gain greater control over her physical restlessness, group counselling to provide supportive feedback from peers concerning appropriate social behaviors, and placement in highly structured classes at an appropriate level of difficulty in order to engender academic success. Perhaps the most effective recommendation came from Sally herself, however, who pointed out that she found it most difficult to concentrate in math class and also found it most difficult to concentrate late in the day. She suggested that rather than having math as her last class, which was the case according to her current schedule, she would probably find it at least somewhat easier to concentrate on math if it came earlier in the day. Her math class and English class were therefore switched so that math was her first class and English her last; this seemed to improve her math class concentration considerably without significantly hindering her English performance.

By way of contrast, Peter, a high school student who had some tendencies toward depression and for whom math was also a bete noire, indicated that having math during the first period in the day was causing him some difficulty, in that if he had trouble doing the work during his math period (as he frequently did) it would often have a detrimental effect on his mood and performance during the remainder of the day. In his case, his needs were better met by scheduling math last thing in the day so that his performance in his other classes would not be negatively affected by his difficulties in math. (Additionally, simply knowing that when math class ended he would be done with school for the day mitigated the depressive effects previously engendered by math frustrations and failures.)

Three general principles relative to student scheduling are illustrated by these two contrasting examples. First, in determining student schedules, staff should attend not only to issues of course selection but also to the order and timing of class scheduling. Second, schools should strive to maintain sufficient flexibility in their scheduling options and procedures to allow the therapeutic use of such considerations. And third, staff need to actively include students in such planning and programming and to attend carefully to the student's own descriptions of his/her experiences, needs, and suggestions. Often, the best as well as easiest way to determine what changes would assist a student's efforts to be more successful is simply to ask the student directly. Examples of efficacious student proposals from my own experience include modifying a schedule so that the student would not have the same teacher for two consecutive periods, allowing the student to leave early to participate in a work/study program, changing the timing of study hall periods, and permitting the student to switch from one mini-course, on which the student had satiated, to another. Such interventions can be a source of increased student success and, hence, improved student self-esteem.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the single most important principle in student scheduling is to schedule each student for classes consistent with his or her particular type(s) of intelligence. This is imperative if schools are to engender maximal feelings of success and self-esteem. The implementation of this principle is particularly vital and challenging with regard to educationally handicapped students, as their patterns of strengths and weaknesses may match up least well with the standard academic curriculum. There is evidence that for learning disabled students, self-esteem is highest for partially mainstreamed students - that is, those whose schedules include a combination of special and regular classes rather than either type alone (Smith, Dokecki, & Davis, 1977). Apparently, the combination provides them with two possible self-referent comparison groups from which to select, affording them more varied options when making self evaluations and when attempting to maintain their self-esteem. Although awaiting empirical verification, partial mainstreaming of students with other handicapping conditions may presumably bear similar beneficial results.

More generally, it is only reasonable to expect that most students will perform more successfully if some form of break is programmed into the school's daily schedule. As a very apposite saying has it, "The brain cannot absorb more than the seat can endure." Anyone who has attended an all-day professional conference or convention, even on a subject of genuine interest, can most likely appreciate the difficulty and effort involved in maintaining one's comfort, attention, and learning throughout such an experience. Now imagine going straight through that entire day with only a single 25-minute lunch break. And how much harder it must be for a group of energetic adolescents to sit and concentrate for class after class, day after day, week after week. Yet a great many school systems remain opposed to scheduling respite time for students into their daily schedule! This is truly unfortunate, since as Maslow (1954) has pointed out, one cannot generally attend to his/her higher order personal, emotional, or educational needs until his/her basic physiological and comfort needs have first been met.

Berkowitz (1975) presents an excellent example of a school-wide scheduling change designed to provide increased opportunity for student-teacher interactions as well as to incorporate non-academic free time into the daily schedule. In order to accomplish this, the school's principal introduced an "optional period" into the schedule, during which any student could meet with any teacher for either academic help or discussion of personal problems, or could attend a study hall, or could take part in various activities, such as basketball or chess. Berkowitz reports that this modification was considered to be successful in both intended and unforeseen ways. Not only did students benefit from the academic and non-academic options involved, but also those teachers who continually found themselves to be unapproached and uninvolved during these periods reportedly began to wonder why and to make an effort to become more humane, supportive, and actively involved with their students. This type of innovation would, thus, appear to have potential beneficial impact on student feelings of competence, due to consequent academic improvements, and on student feelings of significance, due to more frequent and meaningful student-teacher interactions.

Chapter 9

Classroom Variables

Uni-dimensional vs. Multi-dimensional Classes

Although school-wide variables and total school climate can have important implications for student self-esteem, much self-esteem development occurs within the individual classroom. One classroom factor having significant effects on the self-esteem of students is the relative uniformity or diversity of teaching and learning experiences which occur within a class. Classes in which only one type of learning activity occurs (most often, the teacher lecturing and the students listening and taking notes, or the teacher asking questions and the students responding) are called uni-dimensional classes. Classes in which several different types of learning activities occur (e.g., those in which there are multiple "learning stations" for students to choose from or in which a variety of creative learning activities such as report writing, illustrating, educational games, group discussions, debating, and dramatics are utilized) are referred to as multi-dimensional classes.

It appears likely that, on average, more students will develop high self-esteem in multi-dimensional, high participatory classes than in more traditional, low participatory, uni-dimensional classrooms. This follows from the fact that in uni-dimensional classrooms, only one type of activity is utilized. Thus, only those students who are most proficient at that particular activity are able to achieve high status. By contrast, in classrooms which incorporate a wider variety of learning activities, a greater number of skills, abilities, and talents come into play; more students are able to demonstrate their abilities, and, therefore, more students attain high status, are desired as friends by other students, and consequently achieve high self-esteem (Bossert, 1979; Epstein, 1983; Karweit & Hansell, 1983; Rosenholtz & Wilson, 1980).

Competitive *vs*. Co-operative Teaching Strategies

Individualistic, competitive approaches to education are so ubiquitous and unquestioned in America, that it is only rarely even realized that other possible educational models exist. One often overlooked alternative strategy is the co-operative approach to instruction. Co-operative learning strategies entail students working in interdependent groups toward some common goal; each student is accountable to and dependent on the other group members. The final group product is seen as a joint group responsibility, with each individual student contributing his or her abilities, knowledge, and skills toward its successful completion. To ensure individual as well as group accountability, the teacher may randomly select one student from the group to present the material, to answer questions about it, or to take a test on it. There is, thus, a strong incentive for group members to teach the others, to accept help from others, and to support each other. It is consequently not surprising that in 35 of 37 studies on interpersonal attraction, students liked each other more under co-operative than under competetive conditions (Kohn, 1987).

Perhaps more surprisingly, there is also overwhelming evidence for the academic superiority of co-operative as opposed to competetive learning techniques. A recent review found that in 26 controlled studies, "21 found co-operation clearly led to higher achievement, two had mixed results, and three yielded no significant differences. The co-operative approach was superior regardless of subject matter or age group." (Kohn, 1987, p. 54)

A more specific advantage of co-operative learning strategies is the apparent potential for decreasing prejudice among students, by assigning students of different races to co-operative groups, therebye increasing inter-racial contact and co-operation (Slavin & Handell, 1983). There is, in fact, evidence that such cross-racial or cross-ethnic learning groups do increase cross-group socializing and decrease prejudice and ridicule (Kohn, 1987), although there are some remaining questions and concerns regarding this procedure (Miller, 1983).

With regard to self-esteem enhancement, the co-operative approach to instruction would appear to offer multiple advantages relative to more traditional teaching strategies. These advantages are most pronounced in connection with two of the sources of self-esteem, feelings of competence and of significance. According to the available evidence, students in co-operative learning groups are both academically and socially more successful than their counterparts in individual, competetive classes. Greater academic success will, of course, engender heightened self-perceptions of competence. Greater social acceptance and interpersonal connectedness will produce increased feelings of significance. And these increased feelings of being competent and significant will result in higher self-esteem.

Such consequences are self-evident; more speculative are the possible impacts of co-operative strategies on feelings of potency and virtue. Clearly, however, co-operative strategies do allow the individual student a significant degree of input and determination within his or her group as well as the potential to be of assistance to other group members. It is likely, therefore, that co-operative strategies will also foster the final two sources of high self-esteem as well.

One aspect of evaluative, competetive school environments which has particular relevance to student self-esteem is a school's grading practices. The traditional, letter grade reporting system necessarily has a direct and powerful bearing on a student's academic self-image and self-esteem, in consequence of the labelling function which such a traditional grading system inveriably performs. No one can seriously doubt that such systems classify and label youngsters. Who has never heard a pupil referred to as an "A student" or a "C student"? In this way, grades cease to serve merely as indicators of effort, achievement, or performance; they come instead to be seen as indicative of intrinsic characteristics of the student him/herself.

Moreover, in our culture the reality is that only grades of A or B are universally considered to be indicators of actual competence and success. If this is so, and if traditional grading practices involve grading to the norm, with C being the average grade, then it follows directly that at least half of all students will be doomed to perceived failure under such a system. It cannot be asserted, therefore, that this type of grading system allows for, let alone generates, feelings of competence within the majority of students. Thus, if we accept as a legitimate educational objective the ideal of inducing feelings of ability, self-confidence, and competence within all students, we will need to seriously consider substantial changes in the current approach to grading.

Of course, those students who do well enough to make the Honor Roll do thereby obtain significant individual recognition under the existing system. It has been suggested by some that schools should implement an Alternative Honor Roll for students who do not qualify for the traditionally constituted Honor Roll, but who merit special recognition on the basis of some other specific accomplishment, such as raising one's grades from D's to C's. While this would certainly be a step in the right direction toward engendering feelings of recognition, significance, and success on the part of more students, the implementation of entirely different grading structures could take us even further toward the goal of allowing all students to obtain such feelings.

Current grading systems are similarly deficient with regard to the adolescent's need to feel potent, powerful, and self-deterministic. This is partially true in consequence of the fact that quarterly grades are frequently experienced by students as being assigned or "given" to them by another ("She gave me a B-"), with no opportunity for meaningful input or control by the student involved. Moreover, students are generally given no opportunity to even formally respond to these quarterly evaluations.

Letter or number grades are also highly inconsistent with the potency needs of great numbers of students because these students have learned that good grades are out of their reach. They therefore quit trying, except perhaps for attempting to do just well enough to pass. Indeed, not only are such students not motivated to work hard, they may actually actively avoid doing school work in order to defend themselves against feelings of incompetence. Their feelings of inadequacy induce expectations of failure, and they would rather not attempt tasks than attempt them and fail. This allows them to "save face" to a certain degree: "I could have done it, I just didn't try."

Moreover, we know from research on the phenomenon of learned helplessness that once one learns that s/he has no real possibility of succeeding, even if conditions subsequently change such that the individual is later presented with such a possibility, it is common to fail to perceive the change and consequently to act as though one were in fact still powerless (Seligman, 1975). It must be acknowledged, therefore, that by the time many students reach secondary school, it has become too late to convince them that they can, in fact, now succeed, even despite the implementation of an alternative grading system which does make success possible. It is therefore imperative that similar efforts also be undertaken at the elementary school level to ensure academic success and to prevent the initial development of academic hopelessness. This inevitable relationship with elementary school practices is further manifested by the fact that successful students who have been conditioned by traditional evaluative practices during elementary school to believe that they are learning and studying solely for the sake of grades may, in fact, sometimes cease working if abruptly situated in a secondary school environment where such grades do not exist. But the desirability of prerequisite changes at the primary school level must not be accepted as a legitimate rationalization for continuing inappropriate evaluative practices at the secondary level.

While traditional grading systems are manifestly detrimental with regard to the need to feel competent, in that they directly and regularly inform many students that they are, in fact, incompetent, they are more subtly deficient with regard to the need to feel significant, by virtue of the fact that they necessarily fail to engender any such feelings in students. The simple assignment of a letter or number grade to a student does nothing to demonstrate to him or her that s/he is a unique, important, or cared for individual to the grading teacher, or to the school. There is no indication that any meaningful thought went into the grade, nor is there any individual personal recognition; each student's report is identical, with only the specific letter or number assigned being distinctive.

Thus, for large numbers of students, the traditional, normal curve-based grading system fails to engender feelings of significance, competency, or power. In addition, because of the quasi-moralistic interpretations often given to grades and academic success in our culture, unsuccessful or marginally successful students often receive messages ascribing to them a lack of virtue as well.

If traditonal letter grades were to be eliminated, while continuing to accept the obvious necessity of monitoring, evaluating, and reporting student performance, then what alternative grading systems could be substituted? It would, of course, be presumtuous to prescribe one particular approach to grading as the most appropriate system for use by all schools at all times for all students under all conditions. Therefore, four different styles of student evaluation will be presented in general terms, for consideration by teachers, parents, administrators, and others involved in determining local grading procedures. These four are criterion-referenced or mastery approaches, narrative reports, self-grading, and individual student contracts. It will be seen that each of these approaches has its own unique advantages and disadvantages which those selecting a grading system will want to consider.

Criterion-referenced testing differs from more traditional forms of testing by measuring a student's performance against some specified criterion of performance mastery rather than against the norm for all students (Cancelli & Kratchowill, 1981). A teacher using a criterion-referenced or mastery approach within the classroom first determines what level of test performance represents an acceptable indication that the information presented or the skill being taught has been mastered. (For example, if the student can do nine out of the ten given problems correctly, then the student has mastered the algebra concept in question.) The student is then tested as to whether, according to the criterion, s/he has mastered the task. If so, the teacher can feel comfortable moving the student on to the next skill to be taught; if not, the student continues to work on the old skill until it is, in fact, mastered.

The primary advantage of the criterion-referenced approach to teaching and evaluation is that it relies on a form of information which is useful to both teachers and students, rather than on a system which, it has been said, does no more than determine which 15% of students get A's. There is also less of a potential stigma of failure than is associated with traditional approaches to testing, since not meeting the criterion under this system merely indicates a need for more practice, always with another chance to succeed later on. Consequently, the risk of engendering low self-esteem is greatly reduced.

Current grading practices frequently seem to result in a greater emphasis being placed on the evaluation of performance than on the learning itself. It is a not uncommon experience in secondary schools, for example, for a teacher to refuse to allow a student to attempt to improve his or her grade on a test, the argument being that that is the grade s/he "earned". This strongly implies that the need to accurately evaluate a student's performance takes precedence over the importance of the student's eventually learning the material. It's considered more important to get the right scores down on paper than to allow the student to continue to attempt to learn. Such an educational philosophy, when made explicit, is incontrovertibly absurd. Nevertheless, under current conditions it is commonly true that if a student fails a test, s/he is merely given a failing grade for that unit of material, as if that settled the matter, rather than taking the failed performance for what it is, an indication that additional teaching of the tested skill is necessary. If evaluation and classification is the primary function of education, then traditional grading practices should be maintained; if learning is the primary function of education, then mastery approaches should be substituted.

When it comes to report card grading utilizing mastery approaches, one alternative is to develop a checklist of sequential skills to be mastered, with those skills actually achieved so indicated by a checkmark. Students, parents, and others can readily see what specific material the student has mastered, and what skills remain to be achieved. Students can develop a legitimate feeling of progress and accomplishment with such an approach, as they have a concrete and continuous record of increasing skill mastery. Some teachers have students themselves check off each newly attained skill as it is mastered.

In secondary schools, however, a more commonly accepted type of mastery grade report is that proposed by Glasser (1969). He suggests that schools adopt a grading policy which assigns grades of P for pass or F for fail, depending on whether or not the student has met the prescribed criteria for the course; if given an F, this would not appear on the student's transcript, and it would be up to him or her to decide whether to attempt the course again to try for a P. In cases of exceptional performance, a student might also earn an occasional S, indicating that superior work had been done.

In point of fact, for a great many students the letter grade system in use today is actually a type of mastery report system, one which also has three levels. The top level, and the only one which is truly viewed as indicative of mastery or success, consists of A's and B's. This level differentiates perceived school success from failure. The second level consists of C's and D's; while this type of grade is not seen by students as indicative of true ability or success, it is seen as differing from the lowest level (F) in that at least you do get credit for such courses and don't have to take them again.

A significant difficulty inherent in true criterion-referenced approaches to evaluation is that such approaches demand greater individualization of instruction than more traditional teaching approaches, since different students are working on different skills depending on which skills they have already mastered. And it must be acknowledged that there is evidence that students are less highly motivated and do less well in Pass-Fail courses than in conventially graded ones (Fitch, Drucker, & Norton, 1951). Nevertheless, it is senseless to undertake serious efforts to bolster student self-esteem without addressing the fact that under present grading policies many students are regularly labelled as failures within an educational system they are legally required to attend.

A second possible grading system is the narrative report, whereby teachers provide a written, narrative assessment of each student's strengths, weaknesses, skills, and progress. The most obvious disadvantage of this type of report system within the public schools is its time-consuming nature, given the numbers of students for whom the average teacher is responsible. Such reports can also tend to be highly subjective in nature. The possible advantages of such a system, on the other hand, include the provision of increasingly useful information to the student concerning how to improve his or her performance; the more personal nature of such a report, thereby increasing each student's sense of being a significant and unique individual; and the increased necessity under such a system for teachers to truly get to know all their students as individuals.

Self-grading represents yet another alternative grading possibility. In some classes, such as math, self-grading can be combined with criterion-referenced testing such that students test themselves on individual skills using tests pre-made by the teacher or curriculum developers and chart their own individual progress as they proceed through the various skills. (There is little reason for students to cheat under such a system, since they are not being graded according to some numerical norm and they always have another chance to attempt any failed material.)

Self-grading can also be incorporated into other grading systems by allowing the student to be involved in determining his or her grade. For example, even with traditional forms of grading, teachers can at least discuss with the student what would represent a fair and accurate grade, attempting to reach a genuine consensus. Or teachers and students can sit down together each Friday and agree together on an appropriate grade for that week's performance, with all the weekly grades then being averaged at the end of the quarter to determine the quarterly report grade. And in conjunction with narrative forms of report, the student can be allowed to write a reaction to the teacher's assessment, including areas of agreement and disagreement. (Much as employees in many jobs are granted this privilege with regard to their job evaluations.)

The primary disadvantage of self-grading approaches is that the need to obtain input from and achieve consensus with students can make such approaches time-consuming for teachers. In addition, relinquishing even partial control over grades can be highly threatening to those used to working under the present system. There are a number of substantial advantages to be gained by including students in student assessment, however. First, such approaches can help make students more aware themselves of how well they are performing (which is now frequently an area of only limited insight) and can give all students practice in the vitally important skills of conducting accurate self-evaluation and maintaining ongoing self-awareness. Second, the implementation of such approaches can help to decrease any student perceptions of unfair or arbitrary treatment by teachers. And third, the most essential advantage of such grading systems is the resulting increase in feelings of potency on the part of the students, with a correspondingly greater belief that one is in control of and responsible for one's own destiny. Given responsibility for assessing one's own performance, most students will, I believe, perform with greater, not lesser, effort.

An extension of the self- or joint-grading system is that of individual student contracting, under which students learn and are assessed according to a previously agreed upon written contract between the teacher and the student. Such a contract specifies what material is to be learned; how student performance will be measured; and what grade will be earned according to a specified criterion, or otherwise specifies how credit will be assigned or evaluation will be undertaken.

The advantages and disadvantages of a contacting system are similar to those of a self-grading system, the primary disadvantages being the need for increased time spent by teachers in contract negotiation and evaluation and the anxiety potentially engendered in teachers by relinquishing total control over curriculum and evaluation. The main advantages, on the other hand, include increased feelings of potency in the students and enhanced student perceptions of evaluation fairness. In addition, a specific learning contract explicitly agreed to by a student at the outset of a course or course segment will frequently result in a genuine commitment on the part of the student to work diligently toward the course goal(s) agreed on.

The effects of the current rigidity and overconcern with evaluation of students are numerous and deplorable. Wine (1980), in a comprehensive review of the research on test anxiety, concluded that "it is precisely the 'pervading atmosphere of evaluation' in the schools... that must be altered in order to elicit reductions in test anxiety and change its accompanying peformance decrements and behavioral constrictions." (pp. 380-381) Moreover, we now have abundant evidence that test anxiety can not only result in emotional discomfort but can also have deleterious effects on learning itself (Geen, 1980; Mueller, 1980); therefore, it would seem that an overemphasis on external evaluation can actually impede rather than promote the educational process. Conversely, "there is evidence that cooperative discussions among peers promote higher achievement than do competitive or individualistic efforts" (Skon, Johnson, & Johnson, 1981, p. 83). It would consequently appear that not only the mental health needs but also the academic needs of many students would be better served by an educational system which was less evaluative-competitive and more educative-cooperative in nature.

Some may feel that accomplishing such basic structural changes in the entrenched competitive, curve-based educational system is not practicable. But cooperative teaching strategies have, in fact, been successfully substututed for more traditional approaches in many areas of the country (Kohn, 1987). And as David and Roger Johnson (1984) point out, alternate grading systems are already commonly and successfully used in certain educational situations; for example, individualistic, criterion-referenced approaches are typical of driver education courses, while co-operative strategies are used in musical ensembles. The dissemination of such approaches into other areas of the curriculum is inseparable from issues of adolescent self-esteem, and as such is an idea requiring further thought, refinement, and research.

Student-centered *vs*. Content-centered Curricula

Schools differ in the relative weight they give to the course content which students are expected to master as opposed to the intrinsic developmental needs of the students themselves. Rarely in the real world do schools restrict themselves to consideration of only one of these two dimensions, although A. S. Neill's Summerhill (1960) would appear to represent the extreme of the intrinsic student needs position. In a less extreme form, educators have of late been influenced toward the content-centered end of the continuum by many studies which have demonstrated a relationship between desirable student outcomes, such as academic achievement levels, and curricular variables such as clearly specified objectives, degree of overlap between content taught and outcomes to be tested, allocation of time to the curriculum, and time spent on task (Berliner, 1985). On the other hand, the fairly recent and widespread change from junior high schools to middle schools occurred largely because of a perception that early adolescents have unique social, emotional, and academic needs which were not being met within the typical "watered down high school" model of junior high school. The currently fashionable approach appears to emphasize academic content variables, as exemplified by the "back-to-basics" movement. To the extent that student self-concept improves with greater academic progress and that students respond favorably to consistently high expectations (Austin & Holowenzak, 1985), then students' feelings of competence may be enhanced under conditions with an academic content-centered emphasis. However, a direct concern with student needs for competence, significance, power, and virtue is generally more consistent with student-centered approaches.

I was witness to one occasion on which the clash between an emphasis on content-centered variables and an emphasis on student needs was unusually overt and direct. It occurred in a comprehensive public high school, when guidance counselors and other student support staff became concerned about the relatively large number of Freshmen students who were failing courses, particularly the Freshmen Science courses. In exploring the reasons for such inordinate numbers of failing Freshmen Science students, support staff became convinced that the way the courses were staffed and structured was a major factor responsible for the problem. Over the course of the school year, every student rotated through four different branches of Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Earth Science), each of which was taught by a different instructor. It appeared to be the case that the failing students were adversely affected by these frequent changes of teacher; just as the student was getting used to the individual teacher's expectations, emphases, and teaching style, s/he was abruptly faced with an entirely different teacher, as well as a brand new subject matter.

Based on this analysis, pupil support staff recommended that students have one Science instructor throughout the year, who would teach them all four of the introductory Science units. However, Science department staff were adamently opposed to this proposal, feeling that even at the introductory level it was more important to have each course taught by the teacher who specialized in that particular subject matter than to have maximal familiarity between instructors and learners. Here, then, was a direct illustration of the potential conflict between educational philosophies emphasizing the student/learning dimension of education and those emphasizing the content/teaching dimension. Specifically, there was a conflict between teachers' needs for maximal knowledge of content and students' needs for consistency, with differing judgments as to the relative importance of each resulting in different curricular and programmatic decisions.

Such considerations are rarely so stark and explicit in presentation but are nevertheless frequently confronted. In this particular example, the school sdministration agreed with the Science department staff, and no change in scheduling procedure occurred. It is difficult to know with cetainty whether this was the correct decision. However, with regard to student self-esteem, the following two points should be noted. First, students' feelings of competence would likely rise under circumstances where fewer of them failed (if, as suggested by support staff's analysis, this would, in fact, have been the case). And second, students' feelings of significance would presumably be greater under circumstances of longer, more prolonged contact with a specific teacher, with greater consequent familiarity and involvement between students and staff.

Chapter 10

Possible School-Wide Interventions

As the specialty of Community Psychology has begun to emphasize preventive rather than corrective approaches to mental health, its practitioners have increasingly recognized the importance of life's transitional periods to people's subsequent psychological adjustment (Felner, Farber, & Primavera, 1983). Times of change such as follow graduation, divorce, the death of a loved one, or a change in career are frequently problematic and highly stressful to the individual involved. Therefore, the provision of interventions and supports designed to help people negotiate such crucial periods more successfully is seen to be a highly appropriate and efficient means of preventing or ameliorating emotional difficulties in the population.

Schools can also benefit from this wisdom, by employing a similar perspective recognizing the particular importance of educational transition periods to students' subsequent school adjustment. The most obvious of these educational transitions is the progression from one school to the next, i.e. elementary school to middle school or junior high, middle school/junior high to high school, and high school to college or employment. To the extent that schools can ensure a smooth and successful transition to the new situation, they can minimize subsequent failure, alienation, and rebellion and obviate the remediation of self-esteem decrements.

There is information suggesting that the number and timing of transitions can affect the impact of such transitions. On the average, students appear to be less adversely affected if they make only one change of school rather than two and to be most likely to negotiate such transitions if they occur at older rather than younger age levels (Peterson, 1984). This information has evident implications for school districts' large-scale policy making.

Regardless of when and how often school transitions occur, systematic efforts should be made to provide the smoothest and most successful transitions possible. Finding oneself floundering upon entry to a new school can cause serious damage to one's self-confidence, self-concept, and self-esteem. In order to prevent this, schools should provide sufficient orientation to the new school's programs and expectations and explicit pre-teaching of the skills requisite for success there. Such skills need to be carefully analyzed for the particular school involved; however, in general any skill or task required at the receiving school but not emphasized at the sending school should be taught and practiced before arrival at the new school. Such skills may range from the use of combination locks to accurate note taking to following a printed class schedule to making new friends. Investment of time in the preventive development of such skills can obviate later time spent remediating such deficiencies and their effects.

Another possible means of promoting successful school transitions is to develop a student advocacy program within the receiving school, with each incoming student being assigned a more experienced advocate prior to his/her arrival. This advocate could be either a staff member or an older student already familiar with the school. In either case, this individual would be responsible for meeting with his/her assigned student(s) prior to or very soon after students' arrival at the new school, in order to present information, answer questions and concerns, and provide support, guidance, reassurance, and encouragement. The goal would be to ensure that each incoming student would have a responsible individual available and accessable within the school, an individual known to the student and recognized as a sanctioned and readily approachable resource in times of concern, confusion, or difficulty. The advocate can also be given the responsibility to seek out the student with a specified frequency, to check on his or her adjustment in a more proactive fashion.

As stated previously, either staff or students can function effectively as student advocates for new, inexperienced students. One advantage of having staff members fill this role is that through the process of assisting incoming students with concerns and problems, staff gain a greater understanding of, appreciation for, and identification with the challenges, obstacles, and difficulties encountered by students. The primary disadvantage is the typically low ratio of available staff to students, which may result in staff having so many assigned students that they cannot do justice to the students' needs. A main advantage of assigning more experienced students this role is that the experience of being a mentor to a younger student can serve to bolster the older student's self-esteem, by engendering feelings of significance, competence, and virtue. The disadvantage may be that not all experienced students are capable of adequately advising others or of serving as more mature models of school adjustment.

Another alternative is the use of group work to assist students entering a new school environment. Such groups, which can be led by school guidance counselors or others, are time efficient, allowing for provision of information, training of skills, and answering of questions with more than one student at a time. In addition, such groups allow for peer modelling, peer support, and the development of new friendships.

Counselling groups can also be extremely useful to students facing other life transitions. Two common examples are divorce groups for students whose parents are currently divorcing or who have divorced and departure groups for students who are about to graduate and who are thus facing many significant changes, including individuation from school and home. In either case, the opportunity to share anxieties and concerns, the provision of factual information relative to the given topic, and the mutual support among peers can help to facilitate growth, decrease anxiety, and foster improved coping skills. In this way, emotional trauma can be reduced or eliminated, allowing for a smoother transition, with consequent reductions in emotional sequalae and deteriorated self-esteem.

Increased Student Involvement

Students who are actively and productively involved in the enterprise of managing their school will feel better about their school and about themselves than those who are more passive recipients of educational services. Ways must be found to increase student participation and involvement in the school program.

A logical vehicle for accomplishing this goal would seem to be student government. Unfortunately, however, in a great many instances student government is used to give students experience concerning the form or process of government decision-making but without real control over the content of decision-making. That is, students involved in student government obtain some experience in political and parliamentary processes, but the experience is divorced from genuine authority or control over the important aspects of school life that actually affect students' day-to-day education or experiences. The powers of student government and the domains which student governments may consider are typically restricted to relatively trivial matters - what items to sell at the school store, what kind of a money raising event to hold, when to have the school dance, and the like.

Such restrictiveness is not conducive to feelings of potency in the student body. It is also ironic, because most school districts' stated goals include preparing the students to be responsible citizens. But one cannot teach students to make responsible decisions without granting them some degree of decision-making responsibility over meaningful areas of student life.

In addition to incorporating students into the general governance of the school, student government can be utilized to implement many of the recommended strategies presented earlier in this book. For example, student government can be given the responsibility for designing and implementing a transition program for their school's incoming students. Or they can be put in charge of a school's peer tutoring program. Or they can make recommendations concerning the care and decoration of the school.

These and many similar opportunities can be utilized to provide inherently useful learning experiences to members of student governments, as well as to increase students' feelings of involvement, usefulness, and accountability in relation to their school. Such experiences enable students to feel significant, competent, potent, and virtuous. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is evidence that providing students with a significant role in decision making is associated with improved behavior (Cox, 1978; Duke & Perry, 1978; Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979) and a more positive school climate (Beane, 1979; Breckenridge, 1976; Urich & Batchelder, 1979) and that increasing student responsibilities generally leads to more mature behavior (Rutter et al., 1979).

In one high school with which I have been associated, student involvement is fostered by allowing students as well as staff to submit announcements to be read over the school intercom at the beginning of each day. This participation presents a subtle, salutary message to students concerning their role and importance within the school. Of equal importance, the nature of the announcements submitted are such as to engender feelings of significance in individual students. Many student-submitted announcements wish another student a happy birthday (sometimes birthday greetings even being sung by students), congratulate a student or group on an achievement, or otherwise provide special recognition. Such overt recognitions and rewards are outstanding means of developing feelings of significance within the students being recognized. Other announcements urge students to support organizational activities such as a 4-H car wash, a club's bake sale, or a sporting event. Still others are more idiosyncratic and harder to classify. In any case, students' opportunities for input provide them with a source of significance and power which they would otherwise lack.

Students with special educational needs also, and perhaps especially, need to have the opportunity to influence their educational program. When I have consulted with school-based programs for emotionally disturbed or behaviorally disordered adolescents, I have observed that even otherwise very well-designed programs frequently neglect to provide this opportunity. When this is the case, students experience their program as something rigidly and arbitrarily imposed upon them. Instead, they must be made to feel that they are engaged in a more co-operative, mutually agreed upon educational endeavor. I have found it highly useful, therefore, for the staff of such special programs to meet monthly with each student, to review the student's progress, to set mutually agreed upon behavioral goals, to evaluate together whether the previous month's goals were met, and to plan the youth's future treatment. In some behaviorally oriented programs, agreed upon goals become the basis on which certain reinforcers are, or are not, earned; these contingencies are also determined conjointly. In other programs, there are no extrinsic contingencies placed upon the goals, the only consequences being the satisfaction of meeting stated goals, the recognition of each such accomplishment, and consequent progress in treatment.

In either case, such a system helps meet students' needs for power and control, since they can directly influence the course of their own treatment and education and since they experience success in attaining short-term goals and objectives. Including students in setting goals, selecting educational strategies, and determinining contingencies obviates many unproductive power struggles. In addition, through the process of identifying necessary behavioral changes, negotiating appropriate and reasonable degrees of expected improvement, and evaluating whether previous goals were met, students increase their self-awareness and learn to set and evaluate personal goals. Moreover, much better communication develops between students and staff, as each hears precisely what the other is perceiving, feeling, and thinking. Such direct, personal communication increases feelings of significance and involvement. The use of this approach also allows staff the opportunity for greater individualization; students don't complain about being treated differently from other students when they have been actively involved in planning their own individual treatment. And finally, students have a considerably greater investment in meeting goals and making changes which they have helped to determine than in those which have been decided on by others.

Such meetings not only provide for a regularly occurring means of presenting feedback to each student concerning his/her performance, but they similarly foster the provision of information from students to staff. Often, students will communicate information, perceptions, or desires of which staff would otherwise remain unaware. For example, in discussing with one youth an increase in absences from school, school staff learned for the first time that his biological father, whom he did not live with, had had a serious motorcycle accident in another state and was in a hospital in serious condition. The boy's questionable absences had, in fact, been for trips to the other state with his mother to visit the father. Not only did this information cause staff to view the boy's sporadic absences in a different light, but it also enabled them to better understand and deal with his increased irritability and restlessness in class. It also eventually came out that the boy was occasionally deliberately trying to get kicked out of class, when other students were talking about drinking, as his father had been drunk at the time of the accident.

During such meetings, students will also frequently share perceptions, frustrations, concerns, or suggestions more directly related to classroom practices. In this way, staff become alerted to incipient problems, and joint agreements on consequent modifications in classroom practices can be negotiated.

It would be desirable for the more general student population to have an accepted and systematic means of providing feedback to staff as well. This could readily be accomplished by giving students the opportunity to present written feedback to teachers or others at the end of each month, each quarter, each course, or each year. Structured forms or questionnaires to be filled out by students and presented anonymously to teachers at such times could be rather easily developed. Such feedback from the primary educational consumers would provide teaching staff with important information which might otherwise remain inaccessible - information concerning how they are experienced and perceived by students, which of their practices are felt to be most efficacious or least desirable, what approaches might work better, and so on.

Of course, the initiation of such feedback procedures can at first seem highly threatening to teaching staff. However, the probability of overly derogatory feedback can be decreased by first teaching adolescents how to give useful, meaningful, and acceptable feedback. Ideally, such feedback should be descriptive rather than evaluative, be specific rather than general, focus on behaviors that the teacher can change, and contain positive as well as negative observations (Jones, 1980). In addition to increasing students' sense of potency and significance with regard to their school, the opportunity to present feedback to staff can improve educational practices and increase staff's appreciation of student needs.

Another, more limited means of providing positive recognition and feedback to staff has been implemented in one high school with which I am acquainted. At this school, each year when students are selected for admission to the National Honor Society, one staff member is selected by vote of the student body as an Honorary National Honor Society member. The staff member thus honored is introduced and inducted at the student induction ceremony. In this way, students are able to publicly recognize the positive contributions of a teacher or other staff member every year.

It was recommended in Chapter 7 that schools form inter-disciplinary teams to examine the strengths and deficiencies of the existing school program. It would be extremely desirable in undertaking this task for such school-wide teams to implement a needs assessment survey to be completed by the entire student body. I have found a slightly modified version of the sample device found in Brown, Wyne, Blackburn, and Powell (1979, p. 258) to be very useful in identifying areas of concern and priorities for intervention, based on input directly from students. The use of such a needs assessment procedure in combination with the other procedures suggested above would result in a diversity of student feedback, ranging from single student feedback to feedback from the entire student population. Granting students authorized procedures for providing input and feedback to teachers and administrators will not only increase their perceptions of having a legitimate means of power and influence but will also tend to improve the quality of teaching and the appreciation of student needs.

Interpersonal Supports

The predominant emphasis throughout this book has been on the use of ecological, curricular, and structural strategies for developing and enhancing adolescent self-esteem. The reason for this emphasis, as previously stated, is that genuinely high self-esteem cannot develop in the absence of regularly occuring, real-life successes. Only limited increments in self-esteem can be accomplished through counseling or similar approaches if not accompanied by indications of significance, competence, power, and virtue in the student's life outside the counselor's office.

This is not to say, however, that counseling or psychotherapeutic interventions have no place in self-esteem enhancement. Recall William James's formulation: Self-esteem = $\frac{\#\ \text{Successes}}{\#\ \text{Pretensions}}$ (James, 1980). Up to now, we have been concerned with the upper half of that ratio, exploring ways to increase student success. But counseling or psychotherapy can also be of assistance, by affecting the psychological factors which go into the bottom half of

James's formula.

For certain individuals psychological and cognitive processes play a major role in maintaining low self-esteem. Some individuals invariably tend to ascribe their failures to personal deficiencies while attributing any successes to luck, chance, or external circumstances. Other students have internalized their parents' unrealistically high demands and expectations and as a result cannot see themselves as adequate or successful despite substantial objective evidence of success. Still others have been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused, with consequent feelings of being worthless, soiled, or deserving of such maltreatment. Certainly, for such individuals, therapy, especially cognitive therapies which attack irrational or counterproductive thoughts and beliefs directly (_e.g_., Ellis & Greiger, 1977), can be of vital importance in resolving issues of low self-esteem. In such cases, ecological and educational strategies become highly desirable adjuncts to this other, necessary form of treatment.

A variety of counseling or psychotherapy which is particularly pertinent to self-esteem enhancement is that of group therapy. First, group approaches can help the individual to feel less singular, unique, and isolated in his/her life difficulties and perceived deficiencies. Second, groups allow for development of more accurate and balanced self-perceptions, through the process of reflected appraisals from other group members. And third, groups provide each member with the encouragement and support to take risks, support which is sorely needed by persons lacking in self-confidence and self-esteem.

Groups can also be seen to be a singularly good resource for self-esteem enhancement when considered in conjunction with Coopersmith's model of high self-esteem. Skillfully handled, groups foster intense and meaningful relationships, reciprocal caring and concern, and a cohesion among group members, factors which in turn foster strong feelings of significance and belonging within each member of the group. And since each person not only receives but also provides observations, encouragement, advice, and support to other members, s/he comes to feel increasingly competent, powerful, and virtuous as well. For all these reasons, group counselling can be a potent source of self-esteem remediation and enhancement in the schools.

The staff and students of any secondary school form a vast network of potential interpersonal supports for students suffering from low self-esteem or other adolescent adjustment difficulties. This support network is repeatedly utilized informally by students, but more formalized, creative approaches are possible as well. One such type of interpersonal support system was designed by a creative middle school staff, who were given the formidable assignment of developing an effective strategy for improving the attendance and behavior of the school's alienated and disaffected students, without requiring additional financial, material, or staff resources. They decided that every student identified as falling within the target group would be provided with a three member advocacy team. Each student was free to select whichever three staff members s/he desired - whichever staff the student most liked, felt most comfortable with, or had the most to offer in his or her particular case. These three staff members then became responsible for monitoring the student's progress, for meeting regularly with the student to discuss his or her adjustment and to forestall any problems, and for acting as the student's advocate when problems did arise. In addition, the student was free to approach any of his/her team members at any time for assistance or advice with any personal issues. In this way, students were provided with an established and sanctioned means of utilizing specifically identified, caring individuals to assist them with their personal and educational development, thereby furnishing them with an opportunity they might otherwise lack.

Problems of self-esteem are inseparable from interpersonal issues. The need to feel significant can only be fulfilled in the context of meaningful and significant relationships with other human beings. Similarly, the need to feel virtuous can only be met through virtuous and helpful behavior toward others. Thus, problems of low self-esteem must frequently include interpersonal supports and interpersonal strategies for their resolution.

Chapter 11

Communications Approaches

Gimmicks _vs_. Genuine Respect

The approaches to self-esteem development taken throughout this book have emphasized the premise that major improvements in self-esteem must follow from genuine success in the student's real world. In order to obtain enduring feelings of significance, competence, power, and virtue, students must regularly engage in situations and behaviors where they are, in actual fact, significant, competent, powerful, and virtuous. The problem with many activity-based approaches to self-esteem enhancement is that they frequently consist of gimmicks rather than legitimate opportunities to garner genuine self-esteem. The approaches suggested in this book, on the other hand, have the capacity to allow students to acquire legitimate feelings of self-esteem in a most important facet of their real world, _i.e_. the school.

It must be recognized, however, that even the types of programming and approaches suggested in previous chapters can also become mere gimmickry if they are utilized simply as isolated strategies added onto an existing educational program which is itself inconsistent with self-esteem development. The strategies suggested here will be truly efficacious only if the general culture of the school also serves to make students feel significant, competent, powerful, and virtuous. If a school's staff desires to maximize student self-esteem, they will need to develop an overall school climate which stresses basic human values and considerations. For unless students' daily interactions with staff are indicative of sincere courtesy, valuing, and respect toward the students, add-on strategies or salutary exceptions will be of limited effect.

Research clearly confirms that school climate variables do affect student attitudes and achievement. For example, convivial classrooms, which can be "characterized as warm and democratic in atmosphere, where students co-operate on academic tasks, and where there appear to be a high level of student responsibility for academic work" (Berliner, 1985, p. 145) have been demonstrated to result in higher achievement (Fisher, Filby, Marliave, Cahen, Dishaw, Moore, & Berliner, 1978; Tikunoff, Berliner, & Rist, 1975). Students in schools or classrooms with this type of environment, where their recurring, day-to-day interactions provide them with consistent validation of their self-worth and self-determination, are likely to develop genuinely high self-esteem as well. In contrast, students who are provided with particular activities designed to foster self-esteem but who are otherwise treated in a derogatory, demeaning, or disrespectful fashion by others will find it extremely difficult to maintain high self-esteem. Every interaction with a student, and not just those explicitly designed to affect self-esteem, has the potential to affect the student's self-perception and to raise or lower the student's self-regard. It is, therefore, vital to foster communications strategies which assist, rather than impede, the development of positive self-esteem.

Communication Styles and Student Self-Esteem

Students form their self-image partially through the reflected appraisals of others. If people regularly act as though they like a student, she or he will believe she or he is likable; if people act in a manner indicative of trust toward a student, he or she will feel trustworthy; if others tend to value a student's opinions, the student will conclude that his or her opinions have import. Thus, communication of positive attitudes toward students is a key to affecting students' self-perceptions and self-esteem.

In the majority of cases, communications of positive or negative attitudes toward a student are not explicitly verbalized. Rarely do we say to a student, "I don't trust you" or "I enjoy your company" or "You are significant" or "You are incompetent." But these same messages are nevertheless conveyed almost constantly. The mechanism through which this occurs has been referred to as "mediated learning experiences" (Austin & Holowenzak, 1985; Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffman, & Miller, 1980). An example presented by Austin and Holowenzak is that of a mother walking with her child.

When she is approached on the same side of the street by someone who acts and looks strange, it causes her to feel anxious. "She tightens her grip on the child's hand and walks across the street. No words are exchanged, but a million messages are transmitted. We believe that it is this constant transmission of messages about a person's behavior, particularly by teachers and by the schools, that causes people to belive what they believe to be true about themselves" (Austin & Holowenzak, 1985, p. 72).

School staff members need to learn to be constantly aware of two levels of communication: the overt content of what they are doing or saying to a student and the more subtle, implicit message that they are simultaneously conveying to the student about him/herself. As Ginott (1972, p. 69) has written, "How a teacher communicates is of decisive importance. It affects a child's life for good or for bad. Usually we are not overly concerned about whether our response conveys acceptance or rejection. Yet to a child this difference is fateful, if not fatal."

Of course, most communication with students is verbal, and it is during verbal interactions with students that one must be particularly careful to utilize forms of communication which minimize damage to and maximize enhancement of self-esteem. The same overt message can be conveyed to a student in many fashions and with widely different wordings and nuances. It is up to staff to select the most desirable alternative.

Sometimes this is simply a matter of emphasis. Consider, for example, the following six sentences, each with identical wording: "*I* never said he's flunking math."

"I *never* said he's flunking math."

"I never *said* he's flunking math."

"I never said *he's* flunking math."

"I never said he's *flunking* math."

"I never said he's flunking *math*."

The words are the same, but the message certainly differs. Emphasis and nuance have significant implications for the interpretations which students will give our communications.

Variables other than simple emphasis of expression also strongly affect the impact of communications on students. Two individuals in particular who have presented clear, precise, and cogent systems for communicating with students in a salubrious fashion, conducive to high self-esteem, are Haim Ginott (1972) and Thomas Gordon (1975). Both have written extensively concerning ways to provide positive and negative feedback to students such that positive self-perceptions are encouraged and derogatory labelling is avoided. While such communications approaches to classroom management enjoyed a vogue at one time, with the increasing popularity of more behaviorally oriented approaches, such communications strategies have received decreased emphasis and attention. Yet if a near universal educational goal is the fostering of high self-esteem in students, then educators must learn to communicate with students in a manner congruent with that goal. The training of school staffs in psychologically healthy communication techniques such as those developed by Ginott and Gordon is an absolutely essential element in any systematic attempt to engender positive self-esteem in students generally.

Consider, as one example of the need for sound communications strategies and techniques, situations in which a staff member is compelled to communicate with a student about certain inappropriate, undesirable, or unacceptable behaviors. It is inevitable that at times students will exhibit noxious behaviors in school which simply cannot be condoned. How can the staff member confront a student about negative behaviors or characteristics without thereby contributing to negative self-image and low self-esteem? Both authors offer realistic, concrete, and persuasive suggestions regarding this issue. Gordon, in particular, presents a specific procedure for dealing with such situations, emphasizing the use of "I statements" rather than "You statements" to communicate about problematic situations in ways that do not contribute to students' derogatory self-labelling.

Moreover, as Ginott (1965, 1972) points out, even situations calling for the giving of praise and positive reinforcement can prove to be highly problematical for low self-esteem students. For positive feedback, if presented incorrectly, is likely to be overly discrepant from the student's view of himself/herself and is consequently likely to be rejected. Ginott offers valuable insights concerning how to communicate positive observations to low self-esteem youth in ways which they can accept.

The implementation of sound communications strategies is imperative for fostering increased self-esteem among students. How and what we communicate to students contributes directly and substantially to how and what they think of themselves.

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